ABSTRACT

CROSSLEY, MICHELLE KAY. Pet Loss and Human Bereavement: A Phenomenological Study of Attachment and the Grieving Process. (Under the direction of Dr. Raymond Ting.)

Through the analysis of a phenomenological research design, this study examined (a) the lived experiences of pet owners who have experienced the loss of a companion animal; (b) the similarities and differences of human animal attachment as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners; and (c) the similarities and differences in how one’s worldview shapes mourning over the death of a companion animal as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners. This study used both Bowlby’s Attachment Theory and Kübler-Ross’ Model of Grief as the theoretical foundations and the data was analyzed utilizing Moustakas’ inductive phenomenological analysis guidelines. The research draws on data gathered from 6 semi-structured interviews with grieving pet owners of varying multicultural backgrounds. Participants were gathered from the Northeast and Southeast regions of the United States. The six participants were chosen based on their experience of losing a companion animal due to death and multicultural factors and were between the ages of 36 and 50 or older.

The findings suggest that the bonds guardians had with their companion animals to be true attachment bonds for the participants in this study. These bonds, as well as the grief responses after companion animal death, were found to be influenced by one’s community; a positive support system aided in resolving grief and sharing information about the death to close others. The presence of the bond was also found to influence the grief response after death; without such bond the grief would simply not exist.
Pet Loss and Human Bereavement: A Phenomenological Study of Attachment and the Grieving Process

by
Michelle Kay Crossley

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Counseling and Counselor Education

Raleigh, North Carolina

2013

APPROVED BY:

__________________________________________
Dr. Raymond Ting
Committee Chair

__________________________________________
Dr. Stanley B. Baker

__________________________________________
Dr. Edwin Gerler

__________________________________________
Dr. Pamela Martin
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Rosie. I am so thankful to have had you enter into my life and provide me with unconditional love. You fought, as I knew you would, from the day they took your mean leg until the day we said goodbye. Thank you for making it long enough to meet and love Josie—you treated her as your own. You will forever be my B.G.
BIOGRAPHY

Michelle Kay Crossley was born in Providence, RI. She is the only child in a young and vibrant family and attributes much of her success on the support and love she received from her immediate and extended family. Michelle was the first in her family to attend college and is proud of this accomplishment. She attended Northeastern University in Boston, MA in order to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training (2001). Shortly after graduating, Michelle obtained a position working at her alma mater in the College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office where she was motivated to pursue her graduate degree. She pursued her Master of Science in College Student Development and Counseling (2005) while working full time at the University. Michelle relocated to Raleigh, NC in February 2006 in order to take a position as an academic advisor/lecturer in the First Year College at North Carolina State University. It is here where she decided to apply to and was accepted into the Counselor Education program in 2007.

Although Athletic Training is not a direct correlation to a career in counseling, there were many influences. In her time working with student-athletes, she frequently saw individuals struggling mentally with their physical injuries. After graduating, she learned that two student-athletes that she had previously worked with ended their lives and this only created more of a desire for her to continue her studies in counseling. Although Michelle has never worked directly in clinical mental health, many of her positions have required utilization of the skills she acquired in the classroom. Michelle obtained her National Certified Counselor Certification in September of 2010 and is working toward becoming a
Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of Rhode Island, which is where she permanently relocated in November 2012.

While in North Carolina, Michelle worked at NC State University in the First Year College as an academic advisor and lecturer. Throughout her tenure at NC State, she was awarded with the Pride of the Wolfpack Award, was recognized as a nominee for the University Awards for Excellence, and received recognition in 2008 as one of the nation’s Outstanding New Advisor of the Year by the National Academic Advising Association. During her time at NC State, she was asked by the University community to offer her expertise on a number of topics: co-teaching Group Counseling with Dr. Rhonda Sutton, guest lecturing on Transgender Counseling for Dr. Marc Grimmett’s Cross Cultural Counseling course, facilitating discussions on multicultural competencies for therapists for Dr. Pamela Martin’s undergraduate Psychology seminar, and facilitating Dr. Raymond Ting’s Internship in College Student Development course. In addition to that, Michelle was asked by the University to deliver the welcome address to new students and parents at New Student Orientation and spoke to future University Supervisors enrolled in the Counselor Education Ph.D program. She served as a member of the Nu Sigma Chi Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota’s leadership team as President-Elect, President, and then Past President and was inducted into the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society in the Spring of 2010. Michelle has presented at both local and regional conferences around the United States on a variety of topics and has been published in the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. In keeping with her advocacy work, Michelle was also a trained facilitator for NC State’s Project Safe, a coach for Pack Promise students as well as student-athletes,
faculty advisor for NC Skate and First Year College’s Student Council, as well as certified by the University Counseling Center as a Question, Persuade, Refer Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper.

In her personal life, Michelle was married to her partner of 3 years in September of 2008 and they welcomed their first child, Josephine Lucia, in May of 2011. Although the composite of her furry family has changed over the years, she lives with Sully her boxer/lab mix. In November of 2012, Michelle and Sully were certified as a therapy dog team through Carolina Canines Therapy and Teamworks Training and they are eager to begin their volunteer work with the Providence Veteran’s Memorial Hospital in Rhode Island. In August 2012, Michelle joined the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement soon after the passing of her canine Rosie. In October 2012, she became a member of the Board of Directors as well as the Assistant Editor for their Quarterly Newsletter. It is through this organization that Michelle completed a rigorous training to become certified as a pet loss counselor in February 2013; she also hopes to become a pet loss chat room facilitator through an internship offered through the association.

In her spare time, Michelle enjoys playing recreational softball, yoga, running races that donate proceeds to non-profit organizations, and spending quality time with her family and friends. Michelle hopes to keep in connection with a student population in the classroom through an adjunct faculty position that will allow her to also dedicate time to mental health counseling, especially with grieving pet owners.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many individuals who have help shape and mold my world; it would have been impossible to travel along this winding path without you—and for that, I thank you. My hope is that no one is forgotten in my acknowledgement, so rather than specifically addressing individuals, I will present my thanks in group form.

Thank you to the participants of this study, who willingly divulged sensitive and emotional information. Without the sharing of your unique experiences, I would not have the deep, meaningful information that is contained in the following pages. You are all brave, thoughtful, loving, and selfless individuals that I am happy to have had the opportunity to know. The memory of your lost furry family members will live on.

To my family—thank you for the constant nurturance and motivating words. Without your love and guidance, I would not have developed into the individual that I am today. To my parents, thank you for instilling in me the will and drive to accomplish things that I hold true and dear to my heart and to be a strong woman, regardless of circumstance. To my partner and children (both two and three/four legged), I want to sincerely thank you for your unconditional love and support; during these past six years you have shown me that I am on this educational journey for a reason—I love you with all my heart.

To my research team—you are the best! I thank you for the hours of unrelenting reading and coding; without which I would not be finalizing this dissertation. I also thank you for participating in this dissertation as it was emotionally challenging for all of us. I am so happy that we were able to provide support to one another as we coded the data and discussed how this experience has provided us with the opportunity to honor the lives of the
furry family members that enter our lives. In the same regard, I would like to thank my classmates—you provided me with much advice and guidance along the way as well as collegial and fun experiences.

To the faculty members that I have had the pleasure of encountering—you have instilled in me an appreciation for the counseling profession. You have all shared with me your insights and learnings over the years. Many of you have provided me with many memories that will last a lifetime—from allowing me a “break” when I needed it (especially when walking clear across campus) to a helpful and supportive ear. Especially for my committee, I want to thank you for the patience and nurturance along this difficult path; without your support in the relevance of my topic I would not be here today. Also, to the wonderful administrative assistant of the Counselor Education team—you are simply amazing, as without the many times that you have helped me along the way, I am sure I would not have gotten through!

For my Counselor Education classmates; thank you for many laughs and providing your knowledge on this process. I will be sure to pay it forward for those who may also seek the wisdom of being a doctoral student during the negotiated exam and dissertation process! There were many times when we all thought we were going to lose it, but as a community we stayed in the right mind semester after semester.

To my friends—you provided support in pursuing my education and for that I am ever thankful. There were many times when I couldn’t be social for educational reasons and you not only understood, but also pushed me to complete my tasks! I couldn’t have asked for a more supportive group.
Although these acknowledgements may seem very vague—I am sure that those who played a major role in my life and the process of attaining my degree will know who they are, and if they are as humble as I, I am sure they appreciate the anonymity these acknowledgements provided.

Peace.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ x
LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................... xi

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................. 1
  Background .............................................................................................................. 1
  Need and Rationale for the Study .......................................................................... 3
  Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................. 7
  Theoretical Foundations for the Study ................................................................... 8
    Attachment Theory .............................................................................................. 8
    Kübler-Ross Model of Grief .............................................................................. 9
  Significance of the Study ...................................................................................... 9
  Research Questions .............................................................................................. 10
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................. 11
  Limitations .......................................................................................................... 12
  Summary ............................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................... 14
  Attachment Theory .............................................................................................. 14
    Attachment and multiculturalism ....................................................................... 21
      * Race and ethnicity factors ........................................................................ 21
      * Gender and age factors ............................................................................ 23
      * Universality of Attachment Theory ......................................................... 24
    Attachment and pet loss ................................................................................... 25
  Kübler-Ross Model of Grief ............................................................................... 28
    Grief, bereavement, mourning, and multiculturalism ...................................... 33
      * Western religions and traditions ............................................................... 34
      * Asian religions and traditions .................................................................. 36
      * Ethnic religions and traditions .................................................................. 40
      * Ancient religions and traditions ................................................................ 44
      * Gender expectations .................................................................................. 46
    Grief, bereavement, mourning, and pet loss ..................................................... 47
      * Pets as support systems ........................................................................... 49
      * Pets as family members ............................................................................ 51
      * Other types of loss .................................................................................... 52
      * Working through pet loss ......................................................................... 54
      * Integration of theories .............................................................................. 55

Chapter 3: Method ................................................................................................... 59
  Design of Study .................................................................................................... 59
  Participants .......................................................................................................... 61
    Research team ................................................................................................... 64
    Researcher as participant ................................................................................. 65
  Instrumentation .................................................................................................... 67
    Demographic form ............................................................................................ 67
# Chapter 5: Discussion

- Synthesis ........................................................................................................... 112
- Internal Process ................................................................................................. 113
  - Acceptance ..................................................................................................... 115
  - Bargaining ...................................................................................................... 116
  - Continued bond ............................................................................................. 116
  - Denial ............................................................................................................. 118
  - Depression ..................................................................................................... 119
  - Improved self .................................................................................................. 120
  - Noted absence ............................................................................................... 121
  - Summary ........................................................................................................ 121
- Bond .................................................................................................................... 123
  - Avoidance ....................................................................................................... 125
  - Beginning of attachment .............................................................................. 126
  - End of attachment ......................................................................................... 128
  - Equivalencies ................................................................................................. 129
  - Linking objects ............................................................................................... 130
  - Summary ........................................................................................................ 130
- Social Influence .................................................................................................. 132
  - Advice givers ................................................................................................ 133
  - Coercion .......................................................................................................... 134
  - Positive support .............................................................................................. 135
  - Selective .......................................................................................................... 135
  - Unfiltered ........................................................................................................ 136
  - Summary ........................................................................................................ 137
- Limitations ........................................................................................................... 137
- Implications for Practice and Research .............................................................. 139
- Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 144

## REFERENCES

- APPENDICES .................................................................................................. 147
- Appendix A ....................................................................................................... 163
- Appendix B ....................................................................................................... 164
- Appendix C ....................................................................................................... 166
- Appendix D ....................................................................................................... 168
- Appendix E ....................................................................................................... 169
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Inter-rater Reliability/Kappa Score Results .........................................................108
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Epoche/Researcher Biases .................................................................72
Figure 2: Illustration of the Internal Process Theme .............................................86
Figure 3: Illustration of the Bond Theme ............................................................95
Figure 4: Illustration of Similarities and Differences of Attachment .....................100
Figure 5: Illustration of the Social Influence Theme ............................................101
Figure 6: Illustration of Similarities and Differences of Worldview ......................106
Figure 7: Illustration of How Themes Impact One Another ..................................110
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The role of pets in human life has been studied more in the past 20 years than ever before. One reason for the increase in interest could be secondary to the benefits that can be gained from living with a pet, or rather a companion animal. Another reason could come from more individuals deciding on pet ownership before having children or individuals who choose to develop their career before a long-term domestic partnership. Companion animals have also been used in a variety of settings to help individuals throughout the years and more attention is being paid in the literature to the human-animal bond and the overall benefits of having a furry family member in the household. Pets have been thought to provide a wide range of positive impacts on the lives of those in which they come in contact. Pets have been found to assist adolescents residing in a mental health facility with treatment (Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997), provide health benefits (Odendaal, 2000), reduce Autism syndromes (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007), develop trust in a counseling session (Parish-Plass, 2008), and be beneficial in helping children deal with and learn about important life lessons (Flom, 2005).

Although animal companionship has been believed to be beneficial to their human counterparts, there are also downfalls to these relationships, in particular, when this special bond is broken due to death as serious grief can be experienced.

Companion animals, mostly domesticated dogs, have been co-habitating with humans for tens of thousands of years. Dating back to the prehistoric times, canines have lived amongst humans and acted as not only a companion but also a protector (Copeland, Olmert, & de Lespinois, 2010). Although today’s companion canine has come a long way from the
wolves from which they are believed to have evolved, the characteristics of the human-animal bond appear to be similar. According to the Humane Society of the United States (2009) 39% of U.S. households own at least one dog and 33% own at least one cat. Many of these pet owners ascribe human characteristics to their pets (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009), and therefore the loss of the companion animal, and the grieving that follows this loss, can be as traumatic as the grief one experiences from the loss of a family member (Brown, Richards, & Wilson, 1996; Field, et al., 2009). Additionally, many companion animal guardians feel more attached to their animal than to other human beings and would prefer to bring their animal, rather than a human, with them to a deserted island if provided the choice (Root, 2002).

The grieving process is an important event that one must face when death, or separation of an important object, occurs. One factor that has been found to impact the grieving process is attachment to an individual or attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969, 1980). Recent research has investigated whether attachment theory can also be used as a predictor for the grieving process of losing a companion animal (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Margolies, 1999; Podrazik, Shackford, Becker, & Heckbert, 2000). Not every individual values pet ownership and relationships that are fostered and therefore it can be difficult in the workplace, personal relationships, and society overall to feel comfortable speaking about the impacts of losing a pet to death. If more individuals are taking on the responsibility of caring for companion animals, then it is important that the grief that one will experience due to death is investigated in a variety of ways so that helping professionals and society can recognize the phenomenon of pet loss and human bereavement.
Grief is something that counselors, many times, must discuss with clients. The natural reaction to stress experienced from loss may be to assume it is due to the loss of a human rather than the loss of a companion animal, but it is also important to recognize the impact losing a companion animal can have on an individual. The grief experienced by individuals whose companion animal dies can be exacerbated depending on a multitude of factors (Gosse & Barnes, 1994). The lack of value that is placed on companion animals by insensitive others is one of the factors that can intensify feelings of depression following the loss. Many individuals believe that pets are not worthy of being grieved over because they can be seen as being replaceable, where a human is not. Social stigma, compounded by the loss of a furry family member can lead to individuals not feeling comfortable openly grieving the loss of their companion animals; grieving in silent can be detrimental to the mental health of individuals. Given the aforementioned information, the potential for counselors to work with clients who are experiencing intense distress over the loss of a companion animal is very likely, and the counseling profession is challenged to be prepared to help these clients through the grieving process just as they would if the lost loved ones were humans.

**Need and Rationale for the Study**

Pet loss and human bereavement has been becoming more popular in the research literature. It is important for those individuals who believe in the power of a human-animal bond to produce evidence that lends to helping professionals and society also realizing how important a bond can be between a human and a companion animal and just how devastating a break in this bond can be for an individual. This understanding can help counselors and other helping professionals when working with clients who may be in distress secondary to
the loss of a pet, and therefore more researchers should be investigating and providing information about this phenomenon in order to validate this experience. Not only can this be helpful in the mental health profession, but it can also be helpful for individuals who supervise others, family members and close friends, and society as a whole. It is through education that individuals can make an impact on society.

Current literature has shown that human-animal bonding and attachment are potential predictors of grief experienced secondary to the loss of a companion animal (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Serpell (1996) attributes pet behavior to the level of attachment that one can experience to their pet; which may lead to varying levels of grief experienced when pet loss is experienced. Just as Bowlby (1973, 1980) proved with humans grieving the loss of an important figure, the feelings and reactions to losing a companion animal that is anthropomorphized by their owner can be influenced by the level of attachment to the companion animal during life.

It is important to determine just how, and more importantly why, individuals ascribe human characteristics to their companion animals, which lends to an attachment. Brown, et al. (1996) provides reasons why individuals, especially adolescents, may formulate strong bonds with their pets. Some of the reasons presented include: affection, intimacy, and unconditional love which are essential for the emotional health and well-being of children. Affectionate feelings for a companion animal can be similar to those seen in human relationships; pets provide individuals with constant attention as they rely on humans to survive and are present to serve their master or human. Intimacy can come in the form of private, confidential discussions children can have with pets, it is noted that pets can serve as
a counselor, best friend, or even a surrogate sibling. Companion animals do not intentionally injure and are an unbiased, loving being that is just there to please their caretaker; there is a sense of unconditional love that cannot be replicated with many human individuals. Not only do humans form these bonds with companion animals but they can also learn important life lessons when exposed to pets at an early age, such as responsibility and dealing with death.

High levels of attachment and anthropomorphism are likely to be present for older populations of individuals as well as children (Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Gosse and Barnes (1994) cite that pets are often perceived by their owners as members of the family and that they can, in fact, enjoy the nurturing opportunities that they can provide to the human. Individual differences can, and do exist between each pet owner and companion animal, and therefore it can be helpful to determine which, if any, human traits and characteristics can suggest the presence or absence of grief following the loss of a companion animal.

Wrobel and Dye (2003) agree with the fact that there can be a strong bond between a human and their pet, but they also recognize that this bond, at times, could be more impactful and powerful than human-human bonds. Emotional attachments between a pet owner and their companion animal can be different and special from the ones that they have with people, especially if the human individual feels physically or psychologically detached from other individuals. Even though the grief that is experienced after the loss of a pet can be similar to that of a human, the mourning process is not for many societal reasons (i.e., no burial ceremonies, few cemeteries for pets, lack of bereavement time from work, shame felt secondary to grieving the loss, and the belief of easy replacement of the pet).
Field, et al. (2009) expanded the research beyond the level of attachment in relation to the grief following pet death and also includes the type of attachment as well as other mediators that can impact grief (social support, strength of pet attachment bond, and continuing bond to the deceased pet). The human-pet bond in death and bereavement terms implies that when pets occupy human roles the loss of the pet can evoke similar emotions and behaviors to the loss of a human relationship (Field, et al., 2009). Citing previous research, Field, et al. concluded that the strength of attachment bond to the pet is an important factor in the extent of distress following the loss of a pet and that is can resemble stages similar to those found in the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief and also lead to sleep loss, days missed from work and other psychological and social difficulties. Additionally, the literature on those who are anxiously attached and experienced loss (Bowlby, 1980) were found to be replicated in Field, et al.’s (2009) pet-loss study where those who are anxiously attached have difficulty regulating emotions during security threats (i.e., death or loss) leading to prolonged feelings of helplessness.

There are many gaps in the literature on pet loss and grief: type of pet (breed, species, and working animals), parental attachment of the pet owner (both as a child and a parent), acquisition of the pet (shelter, private breeder, gift, rescue, etc.), nature of the relationship with a companion animal (pet, service animal), and age of the pet owner when the companion animals was acquired. Many of the studies conducted have been quantitative or descriptive in nature, but within the conclusion and limitations, many note the importance of the qualitative information gathered by simply speaking with the participants. Qualitative research can add rich descriptions to the stages that one goes through while grieving the loss.
of a companion animal, and gives depth to this phenomenon. Past research (Field, et al., 2009; Wrobel & Dye, 2003) appears multiculturally biased in that many participants seem to come from one gender (female) and race (Caucasian). It was important to conduct a qualitative phenomenological study that utilized methods for acquiring a wider range of participants in order to gain a better understanding of the effects of pet loss and human bereavement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main goal of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of pet owners who have faced the loss of one or more companion animals. The variables that were investigated included grief and attachment and how these factors were impacted based on varying dimensions of diversity (geographic location, gender-orientation, race and ethnicity, etc.).

Previous research has not provided results that are generalizable to a larger population; most of the participants were mainly Caucasian women. In order to acquire rich data that can lend information on a common experience, a multicultural and diverse population was needed. Desired participants were from multiple races and ethnicities as well as came from both gender-orientations. Additionally, participants were sought from both the Northeast (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) and North Carolina in order to ascertain a difference in regional location. The goal of this study was to recruit participants that were a representation from a variety of multicultural factors.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the desire to gather a multicultural participant pool, purposeful and snowball sampling methods for acquiring participants was utilized. Interviews were conducted at the ease and convenience of the interested
participants; in-person, via Skype© or over the telephone. Once individuals were identified and agreed to participate, a meeting and a semi-structured interview took place. Participants were required to sign a consent form, as the interviews were voice recorded for future transcription. Because this topic can evoke certain feelings, it was important to accommodate to the participants to ensure their comfort with the process.

Theoretical Foundations for the Study

As with many other relationships, it is believed that one’s level of attachment, can impact the grief that one experiences following the loss of a companion animal (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009, Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Margioles, 1999; Podrazik, et al., 2000). Pets have been found to serve important functions to individuals whose interpersonal relationships are lower in quality. In this situation the bond formed between the individual and the pet can be a strong one, because the pets occupy traditional human roles and can evoke similar patterns of emotions, especially when they pass away (Field, et al., 2009). For this reason, Attachment Theory and the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief were the theoretical foundations that guided this research.

Attachment Theory. Attachment theory describes an emotional bond to another person and is described as connectedness between human beings (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). These bonds are typically formed in the earlier years between children and caregivers. However, these bonds have great impact on the individual and can continue throughout the lifespan. Attachment can also be viewed as a survival and security technique through maintaining close proximity to a caregiver. There are four characteristics of attachment: safe haven, secure base, proximity maintenance, and separation distress. There
are three types of attachment as well: secure attachment, ambivalent attachment, and avoidant attachment. Each type of attachment exhibits different characteristics with regard to the caregivers and their proximity to the child. A child who is not able to form an attachment with their caregiver can potentially develop behavioral problems. John Bowlby initially formulated attachment theory; however, the finalization of this theory heavily relied on the work of Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992).

**Kübler-Ross Model of Grief.** Grief is a response that one experiences in order to help with the healing of a major loss, or perhaps death. This model was created as a way to understand and cope with dying (Buglass, 2010). The model describes five stages in which one will encounter when experiencing a loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages do not happen in order and not every individual who experiences a loss will encounter each stage. It was not an assumption of Kübler-Ross that every individual experiences the same type of grief in the same manner, but rather it is an individual process. The time one spends in a particular stage is not consistent either; many differences cause individuals to proceed through this model in different manners. This model can be used in relation to an emotional response to trauma and is not necessarily and exclusively related to death. The grieving process draws on attachment theory and recognizes the ways in which people make strong bonds with each other and acknowledges the emotional reactions that can result when these bonds are broken (Buglass, 2010).

**Significance of the Study**

Up until now, many of the studies on pet loss and human bereavement have been descriptive studies. These studies have helped lay the foundation for future studies and have
provided much insight about the phenomenon of interest. However, there are many missing pieces to a deep and full understanding of the lived experiences of grieving pet owners. This study gave meaning to the spoken word of the participants and attempted to find links between attachment and factors that can heighten the levels of grief that one will experience secondary to the death of an important being.

The results of this study can be utilized within the helping profession. Death or loss of anything that is important to an individual can bring about symptoms of depression and grief that surface in the counseling setting. The information gained through this research can be used to help better prepare and inform helping professionals to be aware of how important a companion animal can be to clients. It is hoped that this information could potentially modify some of the questions that are asked during an intake with a new client to include the presence of companion animals in the family system. Not only will helping professionals become more aware all of the relationships of their clients, but though simply asking about companion animals within a session can help build rapport with the client.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of phenomenological studies is to provide a picture of the lived world of the participants that experience a particular life event; the same can be said for this study. The research questions that guided the study were: (a) what are the lived experiences of pet owners who have experienced the loss of a companion animal; (b) what are the similarities and differences of human animal attachment as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners; and (c) what are the similarities and differences in how one’s worldview
shapes mourning over the death of a companion animal as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners.

**Definition of Terms**

It is important to define key terms that are contained within the literature. There are many terms that are present in both the pet loss and human bereavement literature and without adequate understanding, one can become confused. Pet loss and human bereavement is not as well-known as human loss grief and therefore it is important to clearly define terms that were utilized in this study. The following terms will be mentioned in the study that relates to attachment as well as pet loss and human bereavement:

1. Attachment- an emotional bond to someone usually perceived as older or wiser (Stevenson-Hinde, 2007)

2. Secure attachment pattern- infants cry little and seem content to explore in the presence of the mother, which correlates with maternal sensitivity (Bretherton, 1992)

3. Insecure attachment pattern- infants cry frequently, even when they are held by their mothers and explore little (Bretherton, 1992)

4. Not-yet attached- infants manifested no differential behavior to the mother (Bretherton, 1992)

5. Human-animal bond- the interaction that a human has with a non-human animal and the nature of the relationship between the human and animal (Beck & Katcher, 2003)

6. Companion animal- pet; a domesticated animal that lives with a human caregiver
7. Grief- the emotional response that is experienced in the early stages of bereavement (Podriazik, et al., 2000)

8. Bereavement- a process of adjusting to the loss of a close individual due to death (Podriazik, et al., 2000)

9. Mourning- the behavior of the bereaved individual and the community after death, which may include culturally accepted customs and rituals (Podriazik, et al., 2000)

10. Anthropomorphism-ascribing human characteristics to companion animal/pet

11. Multiculturalism- not limited to race and ethnicity, but includes gender, sexual orientation, and disability (Brown, Rodgers, & Kapadia, 2008)

Limitations

As in most studies, limitations are acknowledged in this research; namely the relatively low sample size and subjectivity of the researchers. Attempts were made to strengthen the credibility of the results through following interpretive analysis, allowing for member checking, and utilizing a coding team consisting of three trained researchers that participated in reflexive journaling. This research used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit the participants; the meanings made by this group of participants may be different for grieving companion animal owners in other circumstances. However, a perspective is presented about this phenomenon within the results that can be helpful in future research and practice.
Summary

Pet loss and human bereavement is a topic that is being seen more and more in the literature as well as in the counseling session. It is important that we attempt to learn more about the lived experiences of those individuals who struggle through this process in order to better serve this clientele and become advocates to change the stigma associated with pet loss and bereavement. Attachment theory has proven that the more attached an individual is to another being the more intense the grieving process will be when the individual dies. The same can be said about when the individual is a companion animal, however, the descriptive studies to this point have simply verified that the grieving process is real in these types of relationships and that differences exist across dimensions of diversity. What is lacking is a thick description of pet loss and human bereavement that will be gained through the use of a phenomenological approach using a semi-structured interview.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In 2007, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association, over 87 million households owned a companion animal (i.e., dog, cat, bird or horse) and there were a total of over 172 million companion animals in the United States alone (AVMA, 2007). This provides evidence that there are a large number of households that are acquiring companion animals for a variety of reasons. Many pet owners consider their companion animal a part of the family, and as can be expected; when death is imminent serious grief can become apparent (Brown, et al. 1996; Dunn, Mehler & Greenberg, 2005; Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Hunt, Al-Awadi, & Johnson, 2008; Pointon, 2006; Walsh, 2009a; Walsh, 2009b; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). In addition to the stress, and possible depression that can ensue when an important nonhuman member of the family dies, many pet owners do not feel comfortable openly grieving the loss of their pet due to societal pressure, even more so if the individual is male (Field, et al., 2009). There appears to be varying levels of grief experienced by particular individuals and researchers have attempted to answer the question as to why this phenomenon occurs in relation to the attachment level of pet owners (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Margolies, 1999; Podrazik, et al., 2000). It is believed that the more an individual feels attached to their companion animal, the more severe the grieving process will be. Multicultural factors can also create differences in the reality of the grief one will experience after pet loss.

Attachment Theory

Attachment has particular terminology, and as such attachment should be used to describe an emotional bond to someone usually perceived as older or wiser (Stevenson-
Attachment is seen as a way for a distressed individual to seek proximity, mentally or physically, to a protective attachment figure and this sense of attachment remains important across the lifespan and is a universal characteristic, evolutionarily speaking, of all human beings (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). There are four major theoretical constructs that compromise the formation of an attachment bond: proximity maintenance where an individual seeks closeness to their attachment figure, separation distress when an individual experiences distress when the attachment figure is absent, safe haven where the individual turns to the attachment figure to alleviate their distress, and secure base where the individual will use the attachment figure as a base of security when faced with distress or challenges (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011).

Ainsworth, and other attachment theorists, classify individuals into two styles of attachment; either securely or insecurely attached. Secure attachment can be observed when an individual had experienced supportive systems with the primary attachment figure and carries a sense of safety and security when interacting with others (Brown, et al., 2008). Insecure attachment contains two sub-types: anxious/ambivalent or avoidant. Anxious/ambivalent individuals use extreme techniques to increase the proximity of an attachment figure, whereas avoidant individuals use deactivating method which further leads to withdrawal from the figure that is seen as unavailable (Brown, et al., 2008). In terms of the responses an individual, mainly a child, will have secondary to separation from an attachment figure, the following are used as predictors of insecurely attached individuals: protest where there is crying and active searching for the attachment figure and the resistance of others who are not the attachment figure, despair where feelings of intense sadness and a
realization that the attachment figure will not return, or *detachment* where there is a
defensive disregard and avoidance toward the attachment figure when they return (Boyraz &
Bricker, 2011).

Attachment theory is believed to address the prolonged period of helplessness in
human infants and the need to elicit their caregiver’s protection and care through three
hypotheses (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000). The sensitivity hypothesis
associates maternal sensitivity with security of attachment in that infants become attached,
either securely or insecurely, on the basis of the mother’s ability to sensitively respond to the
child’s signals. The competence hypothesis posits that there is an association between
attachment and later social competence where securely attached individuals lead a more
socially and emotionally competent life. The secure base hypothesis states that infants are
likely to feel more comfortable exploring their environment when they feel protected and
comforted by the mother’s presence and in the event of a threatening situation they will seek
proximity to the caregiver. Bowlby believed that the secure base is a universal construct
across multiple realities (Rothbaum, et al., 2000).

Attachment theory, in its earliest inception, was created by John Bowlby through his
experiences and interactions with troubled children. However, without collaboration with
others, the theory may have not been formulated and tested (Mercer, 2006). Bowlby’s
interest in attachment and its impact on the psychological well-being of adolescents began
with his interactions with two boys. He took the time to work with these children in order to
determine the presence of the maternal bond with each of these children (Stevenson-Hinde,
2007) in an attempt to determine just why they were in trouble. These two boys helped
Bowlby in the development of an idea of attachment theory. The theory continued to grow with every step in a new professional path for Bowlby.

Bowlby realized that he could find no existing theory that could sufficiently explain his findings on separation experiences on young children (van Dijken, 1998) as he frequently dismissed psychoanalytic and social learning theories such as those presented by Freud and Klein. Bowlby was introduced to ethology, where researchers investigated problems in nonhuman species that were similar to problems in humans (van Dijken, 1998) and then became interested in Lorenz’s ethology study on the imprinting of geese (Cassidy, 1999; van der Horst, van der Veer, & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Bowlby then contacted Harlow who was studying the attachment of rhesus monkeys (van der Horst & van der Veer, 2008) where they led the way to both theoretical and experimental validation on the consequences of maternal deprivation (van der Horst & van der Veer, 2008). Bowlby was not shy in crediting others in his development of attachment theory; in fact he credited Hinde, an ethologist and individual who introduced Bowlby to Harlow, as one of the persons who was crucial in his personal and scientific development in the 1950-60s (van der Horst, et al., 2007; van der Horst, LeRoy, & van der Veer, 2008).

The impact that Harlow left on attachment theory was one of great importance. Two studies were conducted on mother-infant separation in rhesus monkeys that were modeled on the human separation syndrome that was described by Bowlby (van der Horst, et al., 2008). This study provided further empirical evidence for the phases of separation as were identified previously. After these findings were introduced, Bowlby was able to publish a paper on the effects on behavior of the disruption of an affectional bond, which also made clear that there
no longer was any empirical support for the psychoanalytic and social learning theorist explanations for attachment behavior secondary to being fed from the same source in which one becomes attached (van der Horst, et al., 2008). Bowlby believed in the biological components of homeostasis as the foundations in understanding the relationship between individuals and their environment; individuals choose to keep their system in balancing internal and external factors when the environment is perceived to be threatening (Zentella, 2009).

One of the other major influencers on the final development of attachment theory as it is known today is Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth took over the research on hospitalized and institutionalized children who were separated from their parents, who had previously been found to impact psychological well-being and resulted in identification of three phases of response to separation: protest, despair, and detachment (Ainsworth, 1992). Ainsworth became trained in observational research which is very detail oriented and requires training in naturalistic observation (Bretherton, 1992); Ainsworth found this technique to be extremely helpful when analyzing the results of the study she joined. Ainsworth conducted three important studies based on her experiences with Bowlby: the Ganda study, the Baltimore Project, and the Strange Situation (Bretherton, 1992).

Ainsworth, through her research, helped set the stage for noting different types of attachment (Bretherton, 1992). The Ganda study provided a rich source for the study of individual differences in the quality of mother-infant interaction. Utilizing the evaluation of maternal sensitivity to infant signals, Ainsworth was able to identify three infant attachment patterns (Bretherton, 1992) which, although altered slightly, are used in the literature today.
(Field, et al., 1996). Securely attached infants cried little and seemed content to explore in the presence of the mother, which correlated with maternal sensitivity. Insecurely attached infants cried frequently, even when they were held by their mothers and explored little. Not-yet attached infants manifested no differential behavior to the mother (Bretherton, 1992).

The second observational study, the Baltimore Project, led Ainsworth to better understand characteristics of mother-infant interaction patterns within the first three months through observing meaningful, rather than frequent, interactions during the first-quarter of the child’s life (Bretherton, 1992). Additionally, all first-quarter interactive patterns were also related to infant behavior in the Strange Situation. The Strange Situation study provided further evidence of attachment types and originated a classification system of attachment (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth found that the end of the first year of a child’s life is a critical period of attachment patterns and they can later impact development and function of the individual (Brown, et al., 2008).

Bowlby wanted to prove that his theory of attachment expanded beyond what psychoanalysts and social learning theorists believed to be true about the reasoning behind the attachment between a child and care-giver. Even though this could have made Bowlby less popular in the psychoanalysis realm, it was important for him to expand on potential reasons behind the power of such a relationship. The variety of perspectives that were used lends to the comprehensiveness of the theory. It is refreshing to know, that even early on in this field, that individuals were able to recognize missing links to what was thought to be known and include sciences that may not have initially been seen to be related. Bowlby’s assumptions regarding attachment were that previous theoretical perspectives were not valid.
for indicating attachment, but rather attachment was purely based on organisms, security and survival and is similar to that in the animal world.

Ainsworth’s work in multiple settings helped provide observational data to further prove this theory and adds to the generalizability of attachment theory. Similar findings were acquired both within the U.S. as well as internationally through her work. Attachment theory and what is considered to be a secure attachment behavior has been scrutinized in recent literature as what may be socioculturally normal in one culture may not be in another. It is noted that when repeated, Ainsworth’s studies could have different results (Bretherton, 1992). For instance, there are some cultures that may honor independence, and therefore, mothers or caregivers may not immediately seek to soothe a crying baby. Other cultures may also have multiple care-givers that take part in the rearing of the child, and therefore, the infants may be more used to being around individuals who are not part of the family, leading to less separation anxiety in the absence of the mother. Additionally, within the U.S. family systems can be different in that there are more single, working mothers who may need to rely on day care from an early age. This can be seen to impact the infant, especially if there are many children that require the attention of one caregiver. There are many different scenarios to consider, and therefore, studies should be conducted in more multicultural environments in order to test the generalizability of the theory so that the findings can be better interpreted. However, Bowlby’s work has been influential in changing entrenched traditions in hospitals, Social Service Departments and welfare institutions in order to promote mental health globally (Maratos, 1990) creating social change in a variety of populations.
Attachment and multiculturalism. Individual patterns of attachment exist and can be related to a variety of factors that represents one’s culture, be it gender, age, or socioeconomic status (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). Although attachment theorists believe that the theory is strong in universality, without taking into consideration the multiculturalism of the individual the use of the theory could potentially be damaging (Brown, et al., 2008). Literature differs in the support or lack of agreement on the universality of attachment theory to a multicultural population.

Race and ethnicity factors. As are many theories, attachment theory is heavily rooted in Western (Rothbaum, et al., 2000; Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, & Uchida, 2002), industrialized (Sagi, 1990), two family household (Akiyama, 2008) societies and it is not advisable to assume that the theory is relevant to all populations due to the lack of multicultural testing of the theory. What is culturally acceptable in one culture may not be in another due to desirable characteristics of an individual (Sagi, 1990) and therefore, classifying an individual as insecurely attached based on factors outlined by the theory can be misleading. For instance, one of the characteristics that differentiate a securely attached individual is independence and being able to freely speak one’s mind, however, in Japanese culture the emphasis is placed on dependence and maintaining harmony through avoiding conflict (Rothbaum, et al., 2000; Rothbaum, et al., 2002). In this situation, without adequate knowledge of the Japanese culture, or putting the situation into a cultural context, one may assign an individual as insecurely attached due to a lack of dependence and avoidance of speaking one’s mind.
Western theories do not easily apply in cultures with differing values and norms (Rothbaum, et al., 2002), nor do all individuals within the Western culture have the same attachment style (Brown, et al., 2008). In Chinese culture, attachment behaviors are displayed in ways that best reflect the cultural norms; the extended family can play an important role in the family unit, interdependence is valued more in families and independence is stressed more in school and work (Brown, et al., 2008). In a study on Taiwanese attachment, Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) conducted a literature review on cross-cultural attachment trends and found that: (a) Korean individuals have been found to be more preoccupied in their attachment and low on intimacy and friendship expectations which could be due to strong familial ties, similarly to those from Taiwanese descent; and (b) Asian Indian daughters that reside in the U.S. were found to have significantly higher scores on attachment closeness and dependence than their European counterparts. In the study, Taiwanese individuals were found to derive their identity from group affiliation, view the self as inseparable from the group, value interpersonal harmony, anticipate the needs of partners, and stay emotionally connected to caregivers even when marriage is imminent; true harmony in the family is ideal.

For some African cultures it is appropriate for children to be emotionally inexpressive with strangers; in fact this is what mothers prefer (Keller, 2008). Latino families are more sociocentric and find that extended family is an important source of social contact and support (Posada, Jacobs, Richmond, Carbonell, Alzate, Bustamante, & Quiceno, 2002). It is important to understand how secure attachment is defined in cultures that value different norms than are depicted in attachment theory (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). The fact
remains that through using a Western perspective, there is an overrepresentation of insecure attachment in some African countries, Japan, Indonesia, and Israel (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010).

**Gender and age factors.** Similar findings of attachment in a cultural context have been found where the ideals of attachment theory and securely attached individual is different from the cultural norms of the individual being assessed; this is not limited to racial culture but includes many dimensions of multiculturalism. Males and younger individuals have been found to exhibit more avoidant characteristics, similarly to those who are from poorer socioeconomic environments (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). Regarding one’s gender, Western society places high regard in the differences between masculinity and femininity; therefore it is not acceptable for men to express emotions or speak freely about those emotions leading an individual to place men into an insecurely attached category. Age can also impact one’s characteristic because some transformations in attachment patterns change with age (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). Adolescents are thought to progress through a phase of avoidance from their parents or caregivers and become more involved with their peers, although it is not done consciously or because of an attachment relationship with a caregiver. Of these mitigating dimensions, poverty is seen to have the largest impact on attachment (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). This could be due to the fact that one’s security is always being threatened, which can lead caregivers to seek romantic attachments in order to help provide for their children. Additionally, caregivers in low income areas may have to work more and
rely more on child care which removed the caregiver from the child potentially impacting attachment with a caregiver.

**Universality of attachment theory.** Although there is much evidence that attachment styles can differ among a diverse group, there is also some notions of universality. Attachment theory has been less scrutinized than other Western theories because the proponents of the theory acknowledge cultural differences and theorists emphasize the evolutionary roots of attachment causing the role of culture to be downplayed (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). Using the Western terms of the theory has been criticized when used with multicultural populations; therefore it is important to think of attachment in the cultural context of the situation (Brown, et al., 2008). Bowlby’s theory is based on the behavioral system of a species (Posada, et al., 2002) and although what may be considered to be a maladaptive pattern of attachment for one culture is different from another, the actions are the same. Many contemporary attachment theorists recognize specific attachment behaviors may be exhibited across a diverse cultural contexts, however they believe that the core components are culturally universal (Wang & Ratanasiripong, 2010).

As many other theories of the past have been constructed, so was attachment theory rooted in Western thoughts, beliefs, and values of behavior. It seems as though the attachment patterns and behaviors across cultures are similar, the difference lies in how the behaviors are classified. Therefore, it is important for current scholars and researchers to investigate how different cultures define secure and insecure attachment (Wang & Ratanasiripong, 2010). Being that Bowlby’s theory was rooted in evolutionary patterns of survival, it is important to note that cultural differences in attachment is not considered
inferior if they are not defined differently, but rather that they are an adaptation to different circumstances (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). It must be noted that without a framework of a theory that it cannot be adapted to different cultures; including a different aspect of
attachment theory for each and every culture worldwide would in an essence limit the theory to interpretations and testing of the theory (Posada, at al., 2002). A duty of cross-cultural researchers using any Western psychological or behavioral theory is to understand the specific goals of the individual from a cultural context in order to construct accurate inferences based on the observed behaviors (Weisner, 2005).

**Attachment and pet loss.** Attachment can be used to describe tendencies that one has to develop strong emotion bonds with others, particularly with individuals that can offer a sense of security or safety. However, not all bonds that one develops are true attachment bonds according to the definition presented (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011), and this is a problem for individuals who scrutinize the bond that pet owners can formulate with companion animals. Researchers have linked attachment theory to the relationship one has with their companion animal (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Margolies, 1999; Podrazik, et al., 2000) as well as to the nature of the relationship and reasons for pet ownership (Pointon, 2006; Sharkin & Knox, 2003). Articles have attempted to determine if the type of attachment (Field, et al., 2009) or the attachment level (Brown, et al., 1996; Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Serpel, 1996; Walsh, 2009a; Wrobel & Dye, 2003) of an individual in relation to their companion animal can effectively determine the level of stress and grief experienced by an individual who may lose their pet to death or other avenues. Humans may appear to have an attachment to their companion animals that is similar to the
attachment they experience with friends and family and when the level of attachment is
greater so are the symptoms of grief after death of the animal (Planchon, Templer, Stokes, &
Keller, 2002).

Individuals form attachments to their companion animals as they are seen to provide
something, emotional or tangible, to the pet owners. The question remains in how attached
one can become to a companion animal and how this impacts grief secondary to loss of the
animal. After a loss, an individual will engage in searching for a reconnection with a lost
loved one and experience symptoms of the loss, be it psychological or physical. Blazina
(2011) in review of the attachment literature and pet loss addresses attachment styles and
expressions of loss and searching for meaning. Avoidant styles may be less likely to discuss
the loss and attempt to separate emotionally from the experience. They will manifest somatic
symptoms following the loss including feelings of chest aches and pains. Anxious styles will
intensely pine for the lost loved one and show the most outward signs of searching for the
continued connection. Secure styles are thought to work through the loss better than the
other two styles, but may have problems developmentally realizing that the lost loved one is
no longer present to meet her or his needs. Regardless of the attachment style, there are
feelings of pain and loss with a search for a reuniting experience. These statements were
found to be true in Field, et al., (2009) on attachment styles and grief following pet loss
where more anxiously attached pet owners will experience more grief in the event of pet
death. With statements indicating that similar patterns exist between pet and human
relationships and loss, it can be inferred that humans can form attachment bonds with
companion animals and when the bond is broken, feelings of grief and loss can be expected.
Strength of an attachment bond can have severe implications for the future. Brown, et al. (1996) found that adolescents can form strong bonds with animals as it can help provide a steady, reliable source of affection, especially when parental issues exist. In particular, the girls of the study had seemed to form deeper bonds with the companion animals than did the boys; however one should not make assumptions based solely on gender. Goss and Barnes (1994) found similarities in terms of gender and attachment bonding, but also found that high attachment, low social support, and other stressful events occurring simultaneously with the death of a pet would indicate high levels of grief. Wrobel and Dye (2003) found that individuals can, in fact, form attachment bonds with their companion animals and that they are different from the ones they form with people. Pets can be a source of unconditional love, support, security, safely, comfort, and stability for an individual and is represented in the definition of an attachment bond and just as in human relationships, when the bond is broken the strength of an attachment bond will impact the severity of symptoms and length of the grieving process. Regarding species differences, Serpell (1996) found that individuals may form deeper attachment bonds with dogs versus cats. This could be due to the natural characteristics of both species, both behaviorally and physically. However, when comparing ideal behaviors with actual behaviors, attachment levels were found to be indicative of lower strength of attachment when pets did not achieve the high, ideal expectations of the owners. This can bring an increase in owners surrendering their animals to shelters as they are not living up to the high expectations of an ideal companion animal.

Although the literature is limited due to the newness of the topic of pet attachment and bonding, it appears that what has been proven is that people can form attachment bonds
with other species. This is useful when attempting to decipher what is characteristically seen in individuals who can form these bonds and what reasons for pet ownership can contribute to the strength of an attachment bond. It is important that researchers refer to the bond of a companion animal and guardian as an attachment bond, rather than referring to it as a human-animal bond. Although it is important to recognize the human-animal bond, it helps perpetuate the skepticism of the phenomenon of human-animal attachment bonds and will keep oppressing the feelings of those in crisis secondary to the loss of a companion animal.

**Kübler-Ross Grief Model**

Grief is a response that one experiences in order to help with the healing of a major loss, or perhaps death. The death of a loved one is a painful event that many people must face, perhaps numerous times, during the course of their lives (LaLande & Bonanno, 2006). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross developed a five stage model of grief as a way to understand and cope with dying (Buglass, 2010). The model describes the stages in which one will encounter when experiencing a loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages do not happen in order and not every individual who experiences a loss will encounter each stage and it is not an assumption of Kübler-Ross that every individual will experience the same type of grief in the same manner, but rather that this is an individual process. The time one spends in a particular stage is not consistent either; many individual differences cause individuals to proceed through this model in different manners. This model can be used in relation to an emotional response to trauma and is not necessarily and exclusively related to death. The grieving process and attachment theory are intertwined in recognizing
the way in which people make strong bonds with each other and acknowledging the emotional reactions that can result when these bonds are broken (Buglass, 2010).

Being that death can be a tough subject for many individuals, Kübler-Ross’s work was not always met with acceptance; however it resonated with a multitude of individuals (Oransky, 2004). The fact that death is socially uncomfortable makes it a tough subject to deal with and talk about (Kübler-Ross, 2000). The work that Kübler-Ross did with dying patients could possibly lead to her being one of the most influential people in medicine in the 20th century (Lyckholm, 2004). It was of utmost importance to have an honest dialogue with dying individuals, their families and caregivers. Her work with the dying, as shown through interviews, indicated that it was helpful for individuals to talk about their feelings and fears (Lyckholm, 2004). The honest approach that she established many years ago remains relevant today and the stages have been thoroughly examined.

The death and dying movement of the 1960s focused attention on the needs of the dying and society’s attitudes toward death (Jacob, 1993). Virtually all patients experience preparatory grief when faced with the prospect of impeding death (Periyakoil, Kraemer, Noda, Moos, Hallenbeck, Webster, & Yesavage, 2005). This grief response can be present for a various amount of time and often diminishes. Kübler-Ross identified five stages of grief that was devised as a means of understand and coping with dying and this work was organized around clinical impressions, not empirical data (Buglass, 2010). It is important to note that the five stages are not experienced identically for every person and that they are not linear; some people go back and forth and some seem to experience the stages simultaneously or not at all (Lyckholm, 2004; Friedman & James, 2008). There are many
problems that are indicated for using a stage model for grief, however, Kübler-Ross and many others indicate that individuals who are dying might not go through each of the stages of the model, if at all. Additionally, stage models seem to have been developed within the Western culture, and therefore they may not be generalizable to multicultural populations (Buglass, 2010).

Kübler-Ross developed her theory of grief through recognizing particular differences between her ideas of how the dying should be treated and how she saw that they were treated within the hospitals in which she worked. The belief that there is a fear of death, not only for the person experiencing it, but also for the individuals who surround the dying make it possible for individuals to avoid talking about it. It isn’t something that many individuals wish to speak about, however, Kübler-Ross found that speaking about impending death can be beneficial and therapeutic for the individual as plans are made and realizations come to the forefront (Kuczewski, 2004). Kübler-Ross developed her theory of grief through conducting interviews with patients, which led to others seeing her work in the field as anecdotal and unscientific (Liebert, 2004). The five stages that emerged from the interviews were: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Friedman & James, 2008; Kübler-Ross, 1969).

Initial denial can be seen in the patient who has a difficult time with the realization that death is imminent. This denial can be manifested in a variety of ways, including thoughts that the doctors must have mixed up test results, that there is hope that they will be one of the few who survives, and getting a second opinion. Another form of denial can come secondary to having to live life even though it is apparent that imminent death will occur.
This phase is usually a temporary response and is soon replaced by partial acceptance. Denial can also come secondary to losing someone important. Many times one may encounter a family member that notes they are having a hard time believing that someone is gone from their life, however, they cannot deny the fact that the individual is actually deceased (Freidman & James, 2008) which can lead individuals to assume that denial is symbolic to this population and possibly not a stage. Within the study of individuals, only three of the 400 sampled maintained denial through the end stages of life. These individuals, many times, held on to the denial in the presence of other people, mostly family members, who needed the denial (Kübler-Ross, 2000)

Anger occurs when denial is no longer an option and is not maintained any longer. The patient can start to question why them and become angry secondary to a multitude of reasons. Family members deal with anger differently when experiencing a loss; it is more difficult for these individuals to cope with than the actual patient. Anger can be displaced, and most commonly is directed toward innocent individuals. However, it is important to put oneself into the place of the individual who is experiencing the loss of their own death in an attempt to help that individual better direct that anger. Some believe that anger is not a stage because it is a universal feeling secondary to the loss of someone important (Freidman & James, 2008) and that this anger can be potentially harmful because there are no actions that the individual can take to relieve these feelings of anger. Kübler-Ross (1969) suggests that utilizing respectful communication can help alleviate some feelings of anger for a patient through showing respect and understanding.
There can be times when a patient is no longer angry without any external help; these individuals could have entered the stage of bargaining (Kübler-Ross, 2000). Bargaining can be helpful for the patient, though only for a brief period of time. This can occur when patients try to make some sort of a deal in order to increase the time that they have as a living being. Bargaining can be seen as a way to postpone promises, wishes, and rewards. Many times the individual attempts to bargain with God, or their version of a higher being.

*Depression* can occur when denial of an illness can no longer occur. It is more difficult, especially when going through particularly painful procedures to keep an upbeat demeanor, and therefore, depression may set in. In addition to the feeling of hopelessness, the financial burdens of being sick can contribute to these feelings of sadness. For family members, this depression can occur secondary to losing an individual, especially one in which there was a high level of attachment. Kübler-Ross (1969) identifies two different reasons for the depression: reactive depression secondary to the feeling of hopelessness of getting better and imminent death, and reactive depression which can occur when other factors, such as financial burdens and losing a job, can evoke. It is important for individuals who work with the dying to not focus on looking at the bright side of things, rather it is important to validate the feelings that are being experienced in a way to help the individual explore why these feelings are present. Friedman and Jones (2008) note that it is important to differentiate between depression secondary to grief and clinical depression because there are many similarities that can be experienced between the two, including: inability to concentrate, disturbance in sleeping patterns, upheaval of eating patterns, roller-coaster of emotions, and lack of energy.
Acceptance might not be experienced by all individuals who are dealing with a terminal illness, due to the time that they are given to live. However, this stage can be identified by lessened depression and anger. Acceptance, however, should not be mistaken with an increase in happiness. Kübler-Ross (1969) notes that one patient that was interviewed related it to the final rest before the long journey. Family members may need extra help in understanding this particular stage when their loved one begins to experience it, as it may appear to be, in a way, like the individual is giving up. When individuals fight and struggle to keep hope alive, they may not be able to achieve acceptance. It is as if the more they struggle to avoid the future death, the more they will deny it, and the more difficult it will be to achieve acceptance.

Grief, bereavement, mourning, and multiculturalism. Although Kübler-Ross (1969) attempted to address the universality of her model of grief in stating that not everyone will grieve the same or proceed in each of the stages of grief, the model has been criticized due to the lack of cultural flexibility. The ways in which an individual will react, to a death or another phenomenon, depends on the community or culture in which they were raised. How a person manages grief and mourning for loved ones who have passed away is a way to see into the culture of a person (Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004) and therefore multicultural populations will have varying reactions to losses in one’s life. Not only are there between-group differences but there are also within-group differences (Zebracki & Stancin, 2007). No culture or society has all the right answers about how one will recover quickly from a death in a positive manner (Laungani, 1996). Some cultures will treat death as a communal event, where the entire community and beyond will help pay respect to the dead whereas
others choose to deny the death and would rather not discuss the event; no one way is the right way to grieve but it is important to achieve cultural pluralism through valuing and affirming the differences among people and to use this information to create a new reality (Romero, 1981).

Culture was once defined by one’s surroundings; the neighborhood, the church, the school, family events, and the environmentally driven forces of a region (Romero, 1981). There seems to have been a loss of community over the years in Western society which, in turn, places more importance on re-establishing working knowledge of the death experience (Kübler-Ross, 2000). The decrease of community could be due to the increasing globalization of the United States where more cultures are assimilating to the dominant culture; marginalized groups find their identity and strength in practicing rituals that are accepted by the dominant society (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008). However, the highest value of a humanitarian society is not to demand from its members an erosion of ancient traditions and customs through compromising them and fitting them into the dominant culture (Laungani, 1996) but to learn about and respect the traditions and customs that make us individuals. Within a culture, grief due to death is mostly defined in a way that is consistent with, sometimes unique beliefs of life, death and the afterlife (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008) and individuals learn how to prepare their responses to the death of a loved one as a result of socialization and membership of a cultural group (Catilin, 2001; Weinstein, 2003). In order to successfully resolve a loss, an individual needs to experience a series of adjustments that incorporate critical self-conceptualization and world view changes (Romero, 1981).
**Western religions and traditions.** Western practices have been accepted as universal standards for diagnosis and therapy which can critically impact the context of culture in a negative manner (Hsu, Kahn, Yee, & Lee, 2004). It is important to understand culture in the context of the Western world in which it is compared; this way one can truly appreciate the differences and similarities across a global population. Death, dying, and bereavement are seen as complex problems in the 20th century Western civilization (Steele, 1977). Western thought is based on two essential doctrines: individualism and Christianity (Hsu, et al., 2004). The bereavement rituals in Christian faith typically will include a period of mourning including: a wake, a time for individuals to gather to share fond memories of the deceased, burial after the third day when the soul is thought to rise from the dead, a funeral mass, and then possibly a memorial service (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008).

Western thought has used a traditional lens of severing an attachment bond with the deceased by working through the cognitive and emotional meanings of such a loss; continuing to keep a bond with the deceased can be seen as hindering one’s acceptance of the loss leading to unresolved grief (Hsu, et al., 2004; LaLande & Bonanno, 2006). Recovery from a state of grief to the state before the death of a loved one is a desired outcome of European-American culture (Rosenblatt, 2008). Western thought believes that the only way to resolve the sadness and anxiety that follows death of a loved one is to cut off old bonds in order to be free from the suffering, however, previous attachments can make this an impossible task (Hsu, et al., 2004). Until recently, especially after traumatic events such as 9/11 and Columbine, the U.S. has been characterized as a death-denying society that avoids public discussions of death, dying and bereavement (Doss, 2000).
Men are socialized in Western traditions to avoid expressing emotions for any reason, as that would be seen as a feminine act (Pinhey & Ellison, 1997). Without talking about or working through the grief that is experienced after a traumatic event, it is very difficult to return to a healthy state of being. Escaping the inevitable reality through ceremonial, theological, and taboo beliefs as defense mechanisms is one way in which Western society moves through bereavement (Eliot, 1933). Death is a universal human experience with wide variations in the intellectual and spiritual traditions that aid individuals in managing what Western psychology have identified as grief and mourning (Goss & Klass, 1997).

Spirituality and religion have important impacts on human health and behavior (Becker, Xander, Blum, Lutterback, Momm, Gysels, & Higginson, 2007), especially coping with the death of a loved one (Weinstein, 2003). Due to the increasing globalization of the U.S., Western society lacks a common and specific source of spiritual sustenance (Steele, 1977). There are multiple spiritual realities and religious beliefs that need to be considered before assigning a treatment plan or making a diagnosis based on the behaviors of an individual or community that are grieving the loss of a loved one (Zebracki & Stancin, 2007). Religion and spirituality have been noted to help the bereaved deal with her or his loss and influences culture, sets boundaries, and lays the foundation for integrating new situations and information (Balk, 2005; Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004). Bereavement rituals highlight the important cultural beliefs for dealing with loss (Weinstein, 2003) and can be helpful in understanding the similarities and differences of a global community.

*Asian religions and traditions*. Buddhism has been integrated into many Asian cultures, however, each of these cultures have a different set of traditions and customs that
are practiced after death (Goss & Klass, 1997). In Taiwan and other Asian countries, Confucianism or collectivism, is important in guiding individuals with distinct roles, as part of a group, through loss (Hsu, et al., 2004). The concept of Tao, or a pathway in life, provides a framework for Cantonese bereaved to make sense of frightful and distressing emotions after death (Lee & Laube, 2008). A sense of life after death is typical in Hindu and Muslim traditions (Heydat, 2006; Rubin & Yasien-Esmail, 2004). Although some of the traditions presented may seem strange, individual cultures establish their own standards of what is considered normal and abnormal behavior (Hsu, et al., 2004). It is up to others to learn about the multicultural aspects of grief, mourning, and bereavement in order to truly appreciate the impact culture can have on this universal phenomenon.

A common theme in the literature of Asian traditions is one of continuing bonds and ancestral worship. In Asian cultures, the dead continue to serve as the focus, or important member, of a family through ancestor worship (Hsu, et al., 2004). Valentine (2010) postulated that Japanese culture emphasizes social solidarity rather than individualism and has been found to continue maintaining bonds with deceased family members through unique traditions. The bond between the living and the dead highlights a sense of continuity between this world and the next and emphasis is placed on the proper treatment and respect of the dead rather than the feelings of grief of the living. Through an elaborate and sophisticated system of collective and domestic rites, a reciprocal relationship is maintained where the dead will look out for the living. Within Japanese culture, individuals will engage in funerary rites and after rites for a period of seven weeks and on every seventh day, the family will gather to encourage and support the spirit of the deceased along their journey in
the afterlife. The spirit of the deceased is believed to be in a restless state until the 49th day where it will find its way into the next world. In order for this to occur, however, the family must make offerings and pray daily even after the day of passage into the next world.

The Japanese traditions of continuing bonds are similar to what LaLande and Bonanno (2006) depict as traditional Chinese traditions; including embracing a relationship with deceased family members through performing rites that support a reciprocal exchange between the living and the dead. The funerary rights in Northern China include a 49 day community ritual of chanting, food offerings, and numerous gatherings and after the 49 day period is over, family members are expected to continue the offerings in the hope that they can be awarded with things such as wealth, luck, and fertility by their ancestors. Although this has been the traditional way in which Chinese celebrate death the communist party established new guidelines for urban areas which include shorter ceremonies and cremation of the deceased.

Although it may not be accepted within all Western traditions, many cultures do believe in life after death and reincarnation. Within Cantonese culture, the spiritual belief is that deceased are not “dead” but rather have moved from the material world to the spirit world where they await reincarnation (Lee & Laube, 2008). Taiwanese cultural beliefs regarding death is that there are ghosts and ancestral worship that assists in fostering a sense of harmony and wholeness through the deceased watching over the living family (Hsu, et al., 2004). Westerners have held the misconception that Tibetan Buddhists do not fear death due to the belief in reincarnation; however, fear of death is a embraced by this population due to the sense that nothing in life is permanent (Goss & Klass, 1997).
Eastern cultures have been found to allow for more emotionality in the grieving process (Heydat, 2006) including Muslim and Hindu faiths. This differs from the Western traditions of hiding emotions that arise secondary to the loss of a loved one. Islam provides a complex set of beliefs and worldviews that focuses on the adjustment to loss; loss is a normal occurrence in the life cycle and to deny the loss would be against the will of God (Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004). Denying the death, or possibly going through the Western ideation of the stages of grief, would indicate that one is not accepting of God’s will and is not culturally accepted by Muslims. However, both Western and Islamic societies have consensus on the significance and worth of an individual and have detailed ways in which the survivors deal with the impact of death (Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004).

In an attempt to provide an objective study of Muslim attitudes toward death, Heydat (2006) provided insight into the practices of this faith. For Muslims, a higher degree of religiosity can help in decreasing anxiety during periods of grief due to the beliefs of quality and sacredness in life and death. Public displays of sadness are a signal to the community that an important individual has passed on to the next life; burial is a community event regardless of family connection. In Islam, life is simply a journey in the living world, whereas death is an active journey that one takes through the spiritual world. There is no set path, timeline, or limit to the amount of time it should take for one to essentially recover from the loss of a loved one, however if these feelings begin to impede on the daily actions of an individual they are to seek solace in prayer. However, a three day mourning period has been noted as being religiously sanctioned (Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004). Typically, Muslims are buried within 24 hours of dying and cremation is prohibited, the soul is believed
to leave the body soon after death and certain ritualistic procedures are done before the burial, there is silence at the funeral where crying and tears are acceptable and during the three day mourning period, individuals visit the grave site and recite the Koran (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008).

Death has a recognized place in the hierarchy of community celebrations and is a valid emotional event for the community to acknowledge and support the need to grieve (Romero, 1981). For Hindu families, death is seen as a family and communal affair with funerals being open events leading to the body of the deceased being processed down the streets to the crematorium; individuals are expected to express grief and sorrow publically with the mourning period lasting 12 days (Laungani, 1996). A community presence allows the bereaved to feel supported through this difficult time of grief and mourning. According to Marshall and Sutherland (2008), Hindus believe in reincarnation and all actions in physical living can have implications for spiritual living. Bodies are cremated within 24 hours of death after a purification ritual of washing the body, except if there is a criminal investigation of the death. The mourning ritual can last for up to 15 days where community members offer condolences and a show of emotion is acceptable; this period ends with the final funeral rites, typically by the eldest family member, usually a son.

**Ethnic religions and traditions.** Religious law may be the driving force behind certain bereavement rituals. Those who identify with the Jewish faith are provided with a structured approach to bereavement that follows the strict interpretation of the Torah, both in verbal and written form, which shows reverence and honor for the dead (Weinstein, 2003). The religious laws, so to speak, dictate how long one will grieve, the manner in which they
will grieve, and how one will dispose or treat the body of the deceased. A culture’s funeral rites and instructions to the living and dead can establish guidelines for the emotional expression of grief (Goss & Klass, 1997). Orthodox Jews are not willing to accept bereavement help from those outside the religion due to differing values (Weinstein, 2003); being that these traditions are followed according to religious law, it is important to abide by this notion out of respect for the individuals grieving. According to Orthodox Jewish tradition, there are two specific mourning periods (Weinstein, 2003): the Shiva is for the first seven days and required those who are mourning to remain at home. During Shiva, the first three days is when the bereaved will experience the most grief and by the seventh day they move into a state where they are able to accept condolences and comfort from the community. Individuals are not allowed to work during Shiva. The next period is Shloshim which lasts for 30 days after the burial. For this community, it is important to bury the body as soon as possible, as long as the day does not fall on the Sabbath or another religious holiday. The service for the dead is brief, simple, and directed at continued respect for the deceased where eulogies are given and chanting of psalms takes place; only positive talk of the deceased is allowed during this time. The mourning period varies according to the person whom one is mourning; if the bereaved is mourning the loss of a parent, Shloshim lasts 12 months when the unveiling of the grave typically occurs. During the second period of mourning, individuals will slowly return to society but does not resume full activity. It is tradition to continue paying respect to the deceased through visiting the grave at the end of Shiva and Shloshim as well as on religious holidays and anniversaries.
Slavery has thought to impact the culture of those who may have adopted the European culture. Caribbean practices can vary, then, according to the level and extent of contact made between the indigenous population, African slaves, and European colonizers between the 17th and 19th centuries (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008). Due to the fact that many islands comprise the Caribbean culture, there are a variety of grieving patterns and bereavement practices. Marshall and Sutherland (2008) deciphered some of the meanings of Caribbean grieving practices noting that death and bereavement are associated with traditional values. For instance, in Grenada rituals of bereavement have been and remain to be considered a communal event. For this larger society, religion prescribes the type of behaviors that are culturally acceptable and can vary due to the variety of religions within this region. Caribbean homes are mainly matriarchal and are a plural society that is forced to mix due to the size of the territory and social structure. Grieving individuals come from a variety of geographic locations in order to observe a period of mourning before and after the disposal of the body of the deceased. The period of mourning allows individuals to reflect on the life of the deceased and begin to sever ties and the bereavement process acts as a final familiarization process.

In an attempt to compare different cultures and their ritualistic manners in which they grieve the loss of a loved one, Schoulte (2011) focused primarily on the Latino American and African American populations. One’s cultural values can affect how one understands the world and can influence the way in which grieving occurs, if at all. Because of the variety of nationalities and ethnicities that comprise the Latino American and African American cultures, there can be many within-group differences in the bereavement rituals and grieving
process and may be compounded by other factors such as: sex, age, family structure, religion, geographic location, degree of acculturation and racial identity. According to Zebracki and Stancin (2007), Latino cultural values and traditions have frequently been carried throughout generations despite the inconstancies with North American cultural norms and expectations. The Latino population is believed to be a collective society where support is provided by and given to those within the family and community; very rarely will members of this community seek professional help before getting support from the community (Schoulte, 2011; Zebracki & Stancin, 2007). Latino Americans may grieve differently based on the nature of the death and will typically practice the Roman Catholic mourning tradition of reciting the Rosary beginning the day after burial and lasting for nine days (Schoulte, 2011). As was stated earlier, not all members of one large community like Latino Americans, grieve the same. According to Schoulte (2011) religious influences and spiritual beliefs can affect how one is to grieve, even within a large cultural context. For example, Puerto Rican individuals believe that the afterlife is a place to rest and look after the living, similarly to many Asian practices. A spirit lives and grows within a spirit world until it reaches moral perfection and is detached from the earth. Mexican beliefs indicate an ongoing relationship with deceased through dreams, storytelling, keepsakes and rituals that may include utilization of certain flowers to entice the spirits to return home and dressing dolls in the clothing of the deceased on home altars.

Similarly to the Latino American community, the African American community is comprised of a variety of ethnicities, spiritual beliefs, social classes, geographic locations, family influences, and political contexts and therefore there can be large within group
differences (Shoulte, 2011). It is important before making assumptions and stereotyping individuals into one large group, to get a better understanding of the personal meaning of death and dying. Shoulte (2011) does not make a differentiation when addressing bereavement within the African American population, but notes that this community will typically gather for prayer and meditation to help assist the deceased in its transition to the afterlife. Because family is not restricted to blood relatives, both African American and Latino American cultures tend to grieve the loss of extended family members which can cause more distress. Although not all African Americans are Christian, many traditional Christian influences are evident in the grieving process; death is a form of a new life and that one’s earthly life should be lived in preparation for the next life. Attending funerals within the African American community is a place where respect for the deceased and family is demonstrated, possibly through public emotional expressions. Consulting with a mental health professional, in the wake of severe emotional distress, can potentially increase distress because it is believed that through seeking professional assistance one is going against the cultural norm of relying on familial support. Many will turn to religious beliefs in order to cope with the feelings of grief. Ethnic differences in perceptions and customs tend to manifest into a wider society where they gain acceptance and recognition among groups in society (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008).

*Ancient religions and traditions.* Although the Western tradition is thought to be a death denying society, possibly out of protection of self, one may be able to turn back to some of the primitive coping methods in order to resolve the grief that can be felt by an individual. Steele (1997) suggested that solutions to the problems may lie in rediscovering
effective adjustment strategies that have been practiced for thousands of years. With that in mind, Steele speaks of the grieving process of the Mayan community. Mayans would show their grief and sense of loss openly at night ceremonies, with sounds of crying and wailing to be heard by all that were close. Mayans followed mythical and practical aspects of death which dictated the rituals in which they would practice. Burial of the dead relied heavily on their status and local customs; common man was buried under the mud floor of the house whereas royalty were cremated or boiled. The dead were on a path to the afterlife; dogs were sometimes sacrificed in order to help guide the deceased on their journey and many times they were buried close to their dog and possessions. The survivors of the dead needed to keep with tradition in fear that the deceased would return to claim something from the living; the community’s actions could prevent one from moving to their eventual destination. The mourning period of the Mayan people is a time to display feelings of loss and despair which was sanctioned by the community and lasted a matter of days.

For some ancient people, high value is placed on community and all are included in the funerary and grieving practices. Pinhey and Ellison (1997) depict the Chamorros tradition which emphasized community and gathering. Before a person dies family and friends travel from other parts of the island once they hear of imminent death bringing monetary gifts that are recorded and to be repaid upon the death of one in that family. These individuals stay for nine nights of rosary after death where after each rosary the group gathers together to eat and continue the feasts until after burial. Once the ill person dies, there is a wake which is considered to be a social gathering where those in attendance will watch over the body during the night and artificial flower wreaths and burning candles are
typically present. There is heavy drinking by the men of the Chamorro people, and the women are mainly in charge of the funerary rights. It is believed that communal practices can help provide security and comfort to the bereaved because they are not grieving alone (Laungani, 1996).

**Gender expectations.** Religion and ethnicity are not the only dimensions that can impact the grieving process of individuals; gender has also been found to contribute to the reactions to stressful events (Daggett, 2002; Pinhey & Ellison, 1997). Individuals are socialized at an early age, as to the behaviors that men and women are to express, believing that there is one linear continuum with absolutes at either end of the gender spectrum. Pinhey and Ellison (1997) speak of this in terms of gender socialization where women are empathetic and attuned to their emotions and those of others and ruminate over the emotions that are associated with painful, threatening events. Men on the other hand, distance themselves from others and deny emotions through defining stressors allowing them to maintain unemotional involvement and may be more likely to turn to alcohol in order to work through their grief. Various factors, including cultural conditioning, can impact male grieving to be more action-oriented occurring in a private setting and creating a situation where they are overwhelmed by the intensity and sporadic feelings of grief (Daggett, 2002). Western society discourages men from expressing emotions which can increase the likelihood of internalized disorders (Pinhey & Ellison, 1997) due to the fact that open and spontaneous expression of grief can assist an individual in promoting their own psychological health (Steele, 1977). Women are granted much more leeway in terms of
displaying their emotions after the death of a loved one, not just in Western society but also in others.

The Arab culture balances control and expression of emotions through use of strict gender roles. Men are expected to master their emotions and maintain composure and women receive the social acceptance to express grief in a variety of ways but within some sects are not allowed to attend funerals; Muslim women are allowed much more freedom in expressing their emotional turmoil (Hedayat, 2006; Rubin & Yasien-Esmail, 2004). Within Hindu traditions women should not only be crying at funerals, but be seen crying by all the individuals in attendance (Laungani, 1996). In Chinese families, the differences in grieving responses can be a reflection of inequalities in domestic power (Hsu, et. al, 2004). Within some African American communities, women and children are allowed to freely express their feelings of grief at funerals (Schoulte, 2011).

In addition to the diversity in the public displays of emotionality of grieving the loss of a loved one, many of the rituals that are prescribed by particular cultures also place an importance on the difference of gender. The Hindu community will rely on same sex family members to perform all rights of the dead, especially when washing and purification are concerned (Laungani, 1996). Similarly to Hindu rules, Orthodox Jews are not allowed to physically touch those of the opposite gender when consoling the bereaved (Weinstein, 2003). Women are thought to be the ones responsible for care-giving of the attendants of the funerary rights (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008; Pinhey & Ellison, 1997; Schoulte, 2011).

**Grief, bereavement, mourning and pet loss.** Pets play a significant role in the lives of their caregivers. Some feel that their companion animals are a support system in their
lives (Flom, 2005; Hara, 2007; Murphy, 2006; Pointon, 2006; Schneider, 2005; Watt & Pachana, 2007). Others feel that their pets are not just a companion animal; they are actually a member of the family (Hara, 2007; Knight & Edwards, 2008; Murphy, 2006; Walsh, 2009b). Variations exist in the meaning that one attributes to their companion animals and in the level of distress that is experienced after the loss (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011). The loss or death of a companion animal can evoke denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance that also surface secondary to the loss of an individual (Brown, et al., 1996; Field, et al., 2009). Guilt often surfaces the most because pet owners feel that they could have done something to save the companion animal (Clements, Benasulti, & Carmone, 2003; Sife, 2005) as well as in times when the individual grieves more over the loss of a pet than of a family member (Rosenthal, 2002). Grief can be seen in behaviors such as anger toward the veterinarian, avoidance of memories, difficulty sleeping, eating and concentrating as well as preoccupation with thoughts (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Sife, 2005). Confounds can dramatically alter the way that one grieves when the animals need to be given away, euthanized, are lost, or dies. For instance, cause of death, living conditions (alone or with others or family members), available support, gender, age, personal significance of loss, cultural attitudes toward death, and meaning attributed to the relationship can impact the level of grief one experiences after pet loss (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011). It is important to determine what, if any, factors will contribute to higher levels of grief when working with bereaved pet owners.

Although this phenomenon is thought to be a modern day problem that only impacts U.S. pet owners, Planchon, Templer, Stokes, and Keller (2002) cite examples of how pets are
grieved in other cultures: Egyptians were known to mourn over the cats and dogs in their lives and within Central Japan there are close to 500 animal memorial temples that bury companion animals and perform ritual services after the pet has died. Also, ancient Mayans who believed that the death of a human was simply the beginning of a life after death would also sacrifice the dog of the dead so that it could be useful in guiding the spirit to the afterlife (Steele, 1997) which indicated that there has been some unbreakable bond and relationship between humans and their pets.

**Pets as support systems.** Pets can be therapeutic to their caregivers, offering psychological, physical, and social well-being (Murphy, 2006; Pointon, 2006). For one special population, pets can also assist in daily functioning, especially for those who are blind, wheelchair bound, or may be apt to having seizures or other medical conditions. Individuals who own guide or service dogs have many varying types of loss that they can experience secondary to their companion animals. The service animals may become old, and therefore, unable to complete the needed services that were once rendered to their owners. Additionally, due to the span of time that one owns a guide dog, death can be imminent due to illness or old age (Schneider, 2005). The trust and bond that individuals have with their service dog needs to be substantial. If they cannot trust that their service animals can help with important life tasks necessary to survival, then injuries and possibly, death, can occur. As can be imagined, the bond that one has with a service animal is powerful and, therefore, losing that helper can be devastating. Schneider (2005) highlights the three goodbyes that owners of service animals must face: the decision making goodbye, the working relationship goodbye, and the goodbye of death.
Other populations have been known to use companion animals as a support system; in particular, adolescents (Flom, 2005) and elderly persons (Knight & Edwards, 2008; McGlogan & Schofield, 2007; Rock & Babinec, 2010; Watt & Pachana, 2007; Winefield, Black & Chu-Hansen, 2008). Pets within one’s life can be lead to many, many years of joy and well-being. Many times, the death of a pet is the first experience a child may have with death and dying. For older individuals who may have experienced the death of many loved ones and friends, the death of a pet can be something that is seen as a component to the cycle of life. Important life lessons and skills can be learned, across the lifespan, when owning a companion animal.

Children will, most likely, experience the loss of a pet early on and it can be their first experience with death (Flom, 2005), whereas the elderly may have experienced previous loss in their lifetime. It is for this reason that the elderly population may not be impacted as greatly after the loss of a companion animal. Companion animals for older individuals allows for a balance between an independent lifestyle and emotional dependence on their pets (Hara, 2007). Older individuals live alone more often when not living in assisted living facilities, and owning a companion animal can be seen to provide social support and companionship in the absence of others (McGlogan & Schofield, 2007; Watt & Pachana, 2007). In addition to social support and companionship, there are many benefits that can be seen as secondary to pet ownership, such as increasing exercise and illness prevention (Knight & Edwards, 2008) and having positive effects on human health (Rock & Babinec, 2010). However, Winefield, Black and Chu-Hansen (2008) noted that the attachment to a pet can be damaging to one’s health by interfering with human relationships, causing grief upon
separation, and interfering with healthcare. Additionally, pets can interfere with older individuals receiving proper medical care if they are worried that they will either not have someone to look after the pet while in the hospital or if moving to a long term care facility is indicated but pets are not allowed in the facility (McNicolas, Gilby, Rennie, Ahmedzai, Dono, & Omerod, 2005). Hara (2007) found through the cases of her participants that companion animals helped facilitate family and social interactions, which can be important to older individuals who may feel as though they are alone and abandoned due to their possible ailments and age.

**Pets as family members.** Pets are oftentimes seen as family members by their owners and are treated and sometimes pampered as such. Some owners even take the time to shop at trendy bakeries and buy high-end clothing, toys, and beds for their “fur babies” (Greenebaum, 2004). The bonds that owners form with their animals create this family-like relationship in many cases. Within today’s Western society, there are more individuals who choose not to have children and embrace strong relationships with the companion animals they care for (Clements, et al., 2003). Companion animals can be seen as surrogate children or grandchildren and make the lives of their owners richer and more fulfilling for some older individuals (Knight & Edwards, 2008). It is easy to conclude that when one loses a furry member of the family, that it can be a traumatic experience. Some pet owners have sought out religious ceremonies after the death of their pet or attend services during the lifetime of the pet to have them blessed in a variety of religions when the services are available, further proving how animals are seen as members of the family unit (Holak, 2008).
Companion animals have become a more integral part of the family and are relied upon to meet a variety of needs within the family system: happiness, security, self-worth, decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation (Toray, 2004). Humans have attachments to their pets that are not unlike what they experience with family members and friends (Planchon, et al., 2002). Grief due to the loss of a family member can be overwhelming, including companion animals. Within a family system the loss can be different depending on who is experiencing the loss. Husbands have been found to relate the loss of a pet to the loss of a close friend and wives compare the loss to losing contact with married children; this loss can leave individuals bereaved and may also intensify symptoms of depression and anxiety (Toray, 2004).

**Other types of loss.** Death is not the only manner in which an individual can lose a relationship with a companion animal. Sife (2005) notes that other types of loss can exhibit a grief response after separation, including when the companion animals are: missing, surrendered, legally removed, lost in custody battles, and abandoned to ensure domestic safety. Of all of these circumstances, when companion animals go missing the grief response can be more intense due to a false sense of hope of a safe return. This longing for a happy ending can disrupt healing from the loss of the companion animal by not allowing for resolution of the loss (Sife, 2005). It is important for the bereaved to acknowledge that in order to honor the deceased that they must change the pain in order to happily celebrate the memory of an important life.

Other types of pet loss have been highlighted in the recent years due to devastation after natural disasters. Hurricane Katrina helped spark some of the recent literature because
many individuals living in affected areas were required to leave behind their pets because relief shelters and hotels did not accept animals or they simply could not manage to bring them along to safety. The psychological effects experienced post-natural disaster can be great due to the loss of companion animals (Hunt, et al., 2008; Lowe, Rhodes, Zwiebach, & Chan, 2009). Pet loss and the added traumatic event of a natural disaster may place impacted individuals at risk for higher levels of psychological distress and safety concerns (Zotarelli, 2010).

Social support in relation to psychological distress was evaluated specific to those who must abandon a companion animal in the event of a natural disaster (Lowe, et al., 2009). The results helped support the previous findings that an event as traumatic as a natural disaster, which is already very stressful, can become even more stressful when individuals must abandon their animals. The reasons provided included the position that companion animals many times serve as a support system for individuals to begin with, and without these members of the family, stress may be difficult to reduce post disaster. Both of these studies provide evidence that natural disaster pet-care policies and programs are worthy of local, state, and national consideration. With more and more helping professionals becoming certified in disaster relief training, it is important that the impact of having to abandon companion animals as well as belongings and homes be recognized. Material things can be replaced, but members of the family cannot.

Hunt, Al-Awadi and Johnson (2008) found that the impact of pet loss can be long term as seen in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, or short term as seen with acute stress and peritraumatic dissociation. The impact of pet loss on PTSD can be
accounted for by the trauma that is experienced secondary to having to abandon their animals, and if emergency agencies were prepared to help find suitable shelters for pets in order to reunite owners with their companion animals, there could be an added level of relief and support for victims of natural disasters.

**Working through pet loss.** How society views pet ownership and the grief that pet owners can experience after a loss impacts the bereavement process. Addressing the sociological understandings of companion animals in the lives of their owners is an important component that social workers, and other helping professionals, must assess when creating treatment plans for individuals who are grieving such a loss (Morley & Fook, 2005). Social workers can employ skills that help with the assistance of overcoming the grief that is experienced through pet loss, and it is ever important that these types of relationships be assessed at initial intakes with clients (Donohue, 2005). Social workers can be influential in the healing of their clients through attaining information about the struggles that society presents to grieving pet owners and through developing support groups for those individuals.

Dunn, Mehler, and Greenberg (2005) developed a bereavement support group for pet owners who were experiencing grief in a veterinary hospital setting; many times owners seek the care of teaching hospitals to help cure or treat their companion animals. These facilities may not be equipped to help pet owners through the difficult process of having to euthanize or treat a terminal illness, and creating support groups for these individuals can be a great benefit. It is important for the veterinarians, and veterinary students, to recognize the relationship they have with their clients, especially in times of bad news. Through participating in social support grief groups, alongside social workers and clients, trust is
developed among all individuals involved. Dunn, et al. (2005) found that the support group allowed the clients to get through a very difficult time by sharing their stories and becoming a support system for other members of the group. Without similar groups, either within or outside the veterinary hospitals, it is difficult for pet owners to fully heal from the grief they experience secondary to losing their pet. Society does not always recognize how important and detrimental the loss can be to an owner, and therefore support groups are an added benefit to the pet owner population.

Morley and Fook (2005) go further than other social work researchers in recognizing the importance of providing services to grieving pet owners; although this phenomenon has received support in the literature, grieving the loss of a pet is still trivialized in today’s society. It is important that society stop defining the human-pet relationship in terms of human relationships because it can cause additional stress to grieving individuals and misunderstanding of the experiences of those who lose companion animals. Death of family pets is not fully recognized as a legitimate predictor of grief and there is often little support within one’s community (Toray, 2004). One method of working through embarrassing feelings over grieving the death of a pet is to normalize the experience (Clements, et al., 2003; Toray, 2004). Allowing for the experience to be validated as normal can help individuals open up and talk about the experience as well as possibly provide support from the community that this can be a serious and real experience (Planchon, et al., 2002).

Integration of Theories

There are many variations surrounding the phenomenon of pet loss and human bereavement. Particularly, it is not understood why some people grieve the loss of their pet
and others do not. Many studies have been conducted in this area and have produced inconsistent, and possibly contradictory, results as to factors that may contribute to the amount of grief experienced secondary to the loss of a companion animal (Davis, 2011). There are many theories that have been believed to contribute to this process; however, many more can also be seen to shed some light as to the differences and similarities of this experience.

The two theories outlined in this chapter, Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) and the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief (Kübler-Ross, 1969), have provided insight for some researchers in terms of how attachment to a companion animal can impact the grieving process of a pet owner. Grief and loss are at the core of attachment theory (Nelson, 2010). Both of the theories highlight the fact that secondary to loss of proximity either by death or separation can invoke severe feelings of loss and grief and have been scrutinized for a lack of universality. In relation to pet loss and human bereavement, a problem in current society is the understanding that companion animals can in fact be considered an attachment figure. Without this global acceptance that pets are valid figures to which individuals can be attached to there will be misunderstanding and trivialization of the emotions that are heightened after death of a pet. The best way to assess the significance of a relationship is to understand what happens after the relationship comes to an end (Davis, 2011).

Similarities exist between attachment theory and the model of grief, especially in relation to reactions after loss or separation. Nelson (2010) defines the stages that Bowlby referred to in his trilogy: protest is an angry refusal to surrender to a loss, despair occurs after reunion cannot be reestablished, and reorganization is a time when the realization of the loss
being permanent and one’s life without the attachment figure must be reshaped around a new reality. These stages that are outlined are very similar to Kübler-Ross’ stages. Protest can be iterated by feelings of denial and anger; the stage where individuals are in disbelief of the separation and then begin to have negative emotions of anger associated with the separation. Despair is, in a sense, a feeling of being lost and can turn into depression which can also be seen in the model of grief. Reorganization is most similar to the acceptance stage, where one realizes that in order to move past a depressive state that a new reality must be created and this reality is one where the lost figure is not present. The one difference in the theories is the thought of bargaining; if the attachment figure is no longer present within Bowlby’s framework, then with who would one bargain?

The two theories can easily overlap in the responses of the loss of an attachment figure; however, there are also evident differences. Bowlby’s stages seem to have a progressive path, whereas Kübler-Ross acknowledges that there is not one way in which one grieves. The model of grief can be appreciated to have a different path, time duration, and skipping of stages; the experience is just as unique as the individual. Bowlby, on the other hand, posits that all individuals when faced with a loss of an attachment figure will experience specific stages and depending on the type of attachment one had with the figure, the experience will also be different. Securely attached individuals are more able to balance the experiences of reorganization and will even seek help and emotional support, anxiously attached individuals are more apt to hyperactivate the grieving experience leading to an intensification of negative effects, whereas avoidant individuals tend to deactivate and do not consciously grieve through suppressing thoughts about the loss (Nelson, 2010). This can be
seen as somewhat similar to the differences in multicultural factors of the model of grief where some cultures will openly grieve, cry and wail and others will suppress their emotions.

The literature presented suggests that individuals can grieve more severely over the death of a companion animal than they may over the death of a human in their lives. There are a variety of factors that can be associated to the different stages or feelings that one encounters when a companion animal dies, and even more variation secondary to the nature of the death or loss. It is important that this phenomenon be investigated through listening to the meaning that one makes of the loss and the somatic symptoms that one will experience. Including a multicultural population is also important in attempting to understand how individuals grieve and if any common themes surface. Today’s society is one where the loss of a companion animal is often trivialized and marked as not important; due to this ideation, it is difficult for individuals to make progress, physically and mentally. It is important for more individuals to learn about and understand the strength of a relationship between a human and their companion animal before we can find a common ground in respecting the grief that one experiences after they lose their pet.
Chapter 3: Method

The goal of this research was to understand the lived experiences of a multicultural sample of pet owners who have lost a companion animal due to death. Specifically, what meanings did the participants make of the death and what did they experience, emotionally and physically, after the loss. Past studies on the topic of pet loss and human bereavement have mostly been descriptive in nature and have alluded to the significant contribution to the literature that a qualitative study can provide. The topic is gaining popularity among the literature, especially for helping professionals. However, there are still many contradictory results and variety in how people grieve the loss of a companion animal and if demographic factors play a role in the wide range of emotions displayed. Therefore, this study was a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach in order to provide rich descriptions of the experience of surviving a companion animal.

Design of Study

Qualitative research helps with understanding the complex nature of an individual’s life by examining their perspective in context of a particular life event and stresses the process in which one creates meaning to the lived experience (Wang, 2008). The nature of phenomenological research is to study the lived experience of individuals as they make sense of the events that are impacting them in their own words (Rosenblatt, 2008); to describe the lived experience of a particular phenomenon. This study was conducted using a phenomenological approach from where an interpretive/constructivist framework was utilized. The goal of the study was to learn more about the lived experiences of the participants, appreciating that there are many realities through using an ontological
perspective. Due to the sensitive and limited nature of pet loss and human bereavement research and literature, it is important for future researchers and counselors to have a picture of what is experienced after the death of a companion animal and this provided a clear direction as to the design of the proposed study.

Phenomenological approaches in research seek to find meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a person or group of people who encounter the same, or similar, phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Bereavement over the death of a companion animal can be a stressful event in one’s life. The variety in how individuals grieve over the loss of a companion animal can be directly impacted by the societal importance, or lack thereof, placed on human-animal relationships and bonds. Therefore, an interpretive/constructivist framework was utilized as it allows for the recognition and study of the multiple realities that are constructed by individuals and how society can impact these realities (Patton, 2002).

Encompassed within the interpretive/constructivist philosophy is the ontological perspective; all experiences and statements about those experiences rely on an individual’s worldview. Each individual companion animal parent has a different bond with their pet, and therefore the attachments, relationships, and roles of the companion animal can vary greatly. One’s society, upbringing, and culture can be factors that greatly influence the variation that is experienced between individuals who seemingly have similarities within one’s life. Those who experience grief over the loss of a companion animal can be seen as a marginalized population; U.S. culture does not recognize the importance of grieving over the loss of a pet. This study was best conducted through using the interpretive/constructivist framework and
ontological perspective for this population because it can “give voice” to those pet owners who may feel oppressed by a society that does not recognize the impact of such an event.

Although the interpretive/constructive framework and ontological perspective recognizes that differences occur, Patton (2002) states that phenomenological research recognizes that what is important to know is how individuals interpret the world and how this interpretation impacts an experience, the only way to truly know what one will experience is through personally experiencing the phenomenon, and there is an assumption that there is an essence of a shared experience. The shared experience in this case is grief following the death of a companion animal. Although it is recognized that individual differences in how grief and bereavement is expressed due to a variety of cultural and societal factors, this is a process that those who have had the opportunity to be a member of human-animal relationships will experience one time or multiple times within a lifetime.

Participants

The phenomenon of interest in this research is how pet owners grieve following the death of a companion animal; therefore, the participants for the study were chosen based on two criteria: previous companion animal relationship(s) and previous experience with the death of a companion animal. Other criteria that were used included demographic information that aided in the creation of a multicultural sample of participants. Participants were comprised of a heterogeneous sample with respect to geographic location, gender identity, race or ethnicity, age, religious or spiritual affiliation, marital status and family household composition, employment status, education level, breed, species, and intactness
(spay/neuter) of companion animal, length of time since death of companion animal, and amount of money spent caring for the companion animal.

The six participants were recruited through purposeful sampling and snowballing from both the Northeast (three from Massachusetts and one from Connecticut) and Southeast (two from North Carolina) United States. The sample comprised of both gender identities three females and three males and a range of race/ethnicities; one African-American/Black, two Asian (Indian and Japanese), and three Caucasian/White. The two participants that identified as Asian American are considered 1.0 generation to the U.S. as they relocated in early adulthood. Participants ranged in age from 36-40 to 50+. The participants also came from a variety of religious backgrounds: one Hindu, one Catholic, one non-practicing Catholic, two Christian (one noted they were non-denominational), and one non-affiliated. A range of marital statuses and family household were also present with two participants self-identifying they were single and four married with one of the married participants noting in their interview that they had been divorced and remarried; all of the participants identified as heterosexual. In terms of family household, one participant lived alone and the remaining lived with a combination of partners/spouses, children/grandchildren, grandparent/grandparent-in-law and parents. One of the six participants was unemployed at the time of the study and all of the participants were deemed as highly educated; obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher with one participant holding a master’s degree. All but one of the participant’s companion animals was a canine and both biological sexes and neuter/spay histories were represented by the participant pool. Time since the loss of companion animal at the time of the interview ranged from five weeks to twenty-three years. A range of how
much money was spent caring for the companion animal was also represented from $125 (5000 Rupees) to $15-20,000. A more thorough description of the participants will be provided in Chapter 4.

Previous studies, referred to in Chapters 1 and 2 have been limited in the associations that can be made across a multicultural sample that have experienced the loss of a companion animal and was the reason for seeking a multicultural sample across many spectrums. The studies note that many of the participants that responded to the surveys were Caucasian women. In order to determine the similarities and differences of individual pet grief and achieve the one of the goals of the research, purposeful sampling was utilized so that a wider net could be thrown in order to capture a multicultural participant pool that has faced the loss of a companion animal. Patton (2002) describes purposeful sampling as a technique that carefully selects individuals who meet particular criteria and offer useful information about the population of interest and in the event that the participant pool is slim, snowball sampling can be used to locate individuals for the research through referral from others. Purposeful sampling and snowballing methods were utilized in order to find the six participants that fit the criteria of: past or current owner of a companion animal and the experience of companion animal death that live in either the southeast or northeast region of the U.S.

Participants were invited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. The participants were able to withdraw from the study if they felt it to be necessary. Interviews were held in private locations and through methods decided on by the participants in order to provide a safe space for sharing a delicate emotional experience. Participants were required to agree to have their interview audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.
Participants were provided with an informed consent describing the nature of the research and the confidentiality of the results; a signature on the informed consent served as agreement to the nature of the research. Additionally, due to the nature of the phenomenon participants were provided with a referral list of counselors and helping professionals in the immediate area of residence who specialize in pet loss counseling as well as a list of helpful websites dedicated to informing individuals of pet loss resources. Participants were asked to create a code so demographic information could be matched to the interview transcription but were not asked to include any personal identifying information in the sake of confidentiality; if the participant mentioned the name of a spouse or family member in the interview the name was not included and rather the role was noted in the transcription. Many times, the participants included identifying information in their code and for the sake of an added layer of confidentiality when describing the participants the primary investigator chose to number the participants in order of each completed interview (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). If participants chose to, they provided personal information in order to stay informed of future research by the primary investigator surrounding the topic of pet loss and human bereavement.

**Research team.** Credibility can be proven through the training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self of the researchers (Patton, 2002). The research team was comprised of two current students and one graduate of a doctorate program in counselor education at a large, southeastern, research-one institution. All researchers, as part of the graduation requirements of the doctoral program, have taken courses in graduate level
statistics and qualitative inquiry. A more thorough description of the research team is presented in the data analysis heading in this chapter.

**Researcher as participant.** In qualitative studies, the primary investigator is considered an instrument in the research process. Being that the researcher takes on the role of a participant in qualitative research, strategies of reducing bias must occur before the study is to commence; this will help in the reduction of researcher perspective impacting the interpretation of the results. For qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument and therefore credibility depends on the ability and the effort of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Bracketing/epoche, reflexive journaling, member checking and analyst triangulation was utilized in order to enhance, or make more credible the findings of the proposed research.

Due to the nature of the primary investigator’s companion animal relationships, the researcher viewed the data from an emic perspective. In order to reduce bias epoch, or self-examination, first occurred for all of the researchers and continued throughout the study. This was done in an effort to list and recognize all preconceived ideas, anticipatory findings, and cultural biases that could have impacted the findings of the study (Daggett, 2002). Interpretive phenomenology is based on the assumption that the observer or researcher and the world cannot be separated (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, & Sambrook, 2010), and therefore bracketing of biases as well as reflexive journaling took place so that the beliefs of neither the primary investigator nor the research team were present in the analysis of the data. Each member of the research team was asked to bracket biases and these biases are listed and documented (Figure 1).
Due to the emic perspective of the research team, it was of great importance to provide credible results in the analysis of the data. There are multiple methods to ensure that the results of qualitative studies are trustworthy or credible; triangulation is one such method that was used in the study. Triangulation includes multiple methods of data collection and/or analysis (Golafshani, 2003). Due to the research paradigm that was utilized in this study, multiple methods of evaluating were not be included but rather multiple methods of analysis were utilized through using three distinct approaches. First, the participants were asked to check the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that member checking assists with validation due to the participants being provided with the opportunity to assess what they said during the interview and ensure the meaning came across as they expected. It also allows for participants to challenge misinterpretations, provide additional information, and clearly articulate understanding; for the purpose of this study the participants were given the opportunity to add any additional information after reading through the transcript of the interview. Second, the research team was provided with the verbatim transcripts in order to complete individual coding. This allowed for independent review of the data and ensured that each member of the research team was not influenced by another. The third method that was utilized was research team member meetings for analysis, ensuring that any personal biases or feelings secondary to the experience of coding the data were discussed and did not emerge in the results. Through conducting team meetings the researchers came together to talk about any common codes that arose from the individual coding and then developed a common code list (Appendix E). After codes were discussed and developed, the research team individually coded the
transcripts a second time and then came together once again to see if there is consistency in the findings across all members of the research team; this is where the themes that emerged from the data and codes were developed. In addition to the triangulation mentioned, Patton (2002) describes triangulation through utilizing multiple analysts as a way to increase credibility of the findings. The research team was comprised of the primary investigator, who conducted the semi-structured interviews, and two other coders who met frequently to communicate about the coding and analysis.

**Instrumentation**

Phenomenological research relies on the narratives of people to define the essence of a lived experience and in the case of bereaved individuals, the truths and insights in their words can be more evident (Rosenblatt, 2008); therefore, a semi-structured interview protocol was used. The semi-structured interview allows for clarification on answers that may not be in enough detail and allows the process to seem as real-life as possible (Dearnley, 2005); this can also help establish and build rapport with the participants by making them feel more at ease and as though they are simply having a conversation. The establishment of empathy and rapport is critical to gaining depth in relation to the information requested, especially when investigating topics where participants can be strongly and emotionally invested (Lester, 1999). Before participating in the semi-structured interview, participants were requested to complete a brief demographic form for the purpose of collecting pertinent information about the background of the participants and the deceased companion animal.

**Demographic form.** Participants were not only involved in the semi-structured interview, but they were also provided with a brief demographic form (Appendix C). The
demographic provided information about the multicultural factors of the participants in order to compare the results to past research as well as inquire about the companion animal in question. The demographic form asked participants to disclose information about themselves, including: race/ethnicity, age range, gender identity, marital and household status, geographic location (current and childhood), family dynamic (current and childhood), religious or spiritual affiliation, education level, and occupation status and field. The information gathered from the demographic inventory allowed the researcher to determine the similarities and differences among a diverse group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon.

In addition to the demographic information about the participant, the form included questions that sought to help the investigator identify the companion animal (breed, sex, and intactness) as well as age of the companion animal at the time of their passing and time since death. Having this information allowed the primary researcher to utilize the name of the passed attachment figure and appropriate pronouns throughout the interview process; this further assisted in developing rapport with the participant as well as gather information that could be insightful into the attachment one had with the deceased companion animal. An additional question was included in the demographic form that could also lend to the attachment one had with their companion animal. According to Dwyer, Bennett, and Coleman (2006) attachment to a companion animal can be assessed utilizing tenets from Social Exchange Theory where benefits outweigh costs in development of an attachment bond. For this reason, a question regarding the amount of money that was spent over the lifetime of the companion animal was included.
**Semi-structured interview.** The semi-structured interview (Appendix D) consisted of 12 questions that aimed to gain insight into the loss of the companion animal. The questions were constructed in order to gain information about what the participants experienced once learning the news of the decline in health of their companion animal, not only emotionally but also in relation to their support system. Questions asked of the participants were a majority of open-ended questions that allowed the participants to share as much or as little information as they desired. The questions were designed to make the participants comfortable speaking freely about the loss of their companion animal with beginning questions probing into the naming of the companion animal and if there was a presence of such relationships as a child. Asking the participants about the happier times of their companionship allowed for the participants to become more comfortable speaking about this difficult time in their lives. Some of the information gained from the rapport building questions will be used in the description of the participants to add depth to the demographic information sought by the primary researcher. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed the primary investigator to probe, if needed, and ask additional questions for clarification purposes.

**Procedure**

**Data Collection.** Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic form and participate in a face-to-face (in person or via teleconferencing software) or telephone semi-structured interview. The utilization of teleconferencing software in research allows for a more affordable and convenient manner in which to conduct interviews when geographic and available time barriers are present. Utilizing this modality to conduct research lies
somewhere in between utilizing the telephone and in-person meetings to conduct the interviews; teleconferencing software goes beyond using the telephone in that it shares the benefits of a face-to-face meeting through allowing for emotions, pictures, and surroundings to be observed by the researcher (Hanna, 2012). Before recording the interview, participants were provided with a brief description of the study and asked to provide informed consent.

Participants were recruited for the study through purposeful and snowball sampling; they included acquaintances of the primary researcher and individuals who were referred to the research by personal contacts of the primary researcher. Each participant completed a demographic form and participated in an audio recorded semi-structured interview. Prior to participating in this study, individuals were informed of their rights as a participant and were asked for approval of informed consent. Participants were informed that they could terminate their involvement at any time they wished and that all materials, should they withdraw, would be destroyed. Participants were allowed to process the experience of the semi-structured interview and were provided with a referral list of online resources and counseling professionals within a local area; this step helped ensure the mental well-being of the participants as well as provided an avenue to further develop rapport. The approximate amount of time required for each interview was between 45-60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in person, via videoconferencing software and telephone; they were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for the purpose of qualitative data analysis.

**Data analysis.** Phenomenological inquiry aims to identify and describe the subjective experiences from the perspective of the participant, without involving critical evaluation from the investigator (Patton, 2002). After each interview was completed, the
primary investigator transcribed the interview verbatim and then provided a copy of the transcribed interview to the participant for review, or member checking. It was important to ensure that what was transcribed was what the participant intended to get across as their personal experience after the death of a companion animal and therefore their feedback was solicited.

Triangulation through member checking, individual coding, and convening of the research team assisted in validating the study. It was important to the primary investigator to accurately reflect the lived experiences of the participants, and not bias the results of the research, and therefore inductive analysis was utilized to develop essences and themes of the lived experience. According to Patton (2002) inductive analysis allows patterns, themes, and categories to surface from the data purely from the words and meanings that are made; one’s bias should not be reflected in the analysis. This allowed the researchers to develop codes for content analysis. Moustakas’ (1994) directions for inductive analysis in phenomenological studies were utilized. This involves four steps that will reduce bias emerging in the data, or lived experience, of the participants: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of texture and structure.

**Inductive analysis.** Before beginning to collect and analyze the data, all of the researchers/coders of this proposed study made evident their biases to the primary investigator about the phenomenon of interest, or epoche (Figure 1). This ensured that all presuppositions of the researchers about this particular phenomenon were in one’s awareness in order to eliminate personal preconceived notions about the subject matter (Patton, 2002). These biases were further used in research team meetings to ensure that when discussing
codes and themes, that one’s personal feelings about pet loss and bereavement did not surface and that the true meaning and experiences of the participants were represented in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher 1</th>
<th>Researcher 2</th>
<th>Researcher 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dogs are man’s/humanity’s best friend</td>
<td>dog owners will grieve longer than cat owners</td>
<td>dogs are better than cats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pets are awesome</td>
<td>the length of time someone grieves will vary on how long they have owned the pet</td>
<td>men grieve less than women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death is the most taboo subject in our Westernized society</td>
<td>the length of time someone grieves will vary on how old the pet was when they acquired it</td>
<td>Caucasian/White individuals bond closer to their companion animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pet grief is a very disenfranchised type of grief</td>
<td>death and grief is an area of gross incompetence for many professional counselors</td>
<td>highly religious individuals will not grieve as intensely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the workplace does not accommodate for pet loss the same as they do for human loss</td>
<td>women will share more than men about their grief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Epoche/Researchers’ Biases
The primary investigator conducted the semi-structured interviews at the convenience and ease of the participants, after demographic information and informed consent was obtained. Once all of the semi-structured interviews were completed, they were transcribed, and then made available to the participants for accuracy. After the participants reviewed the transcripts and information was added if needed, they were distributed to the research team to begin coding. The research team reviewed the transcripts individually to determine if any patterns or codes emerged from the spoken word of the participants. Individual statements were made by each member of the research team during the initial review of the data and were aligned in order to not make one statement seem more important than another, otherwise known as phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction was accomplished through each researcher reading through the verbatim transcripts and developing individual codes that emerged from the data until no new data emerged, or saturation. Each researcher defined their codes and then met as a team and discussed all the codes that emerged for each individual coder; the discussion led to one overall code list, with definitions, (Appendix E) being created to be used by all researchers in order to complete a final coding of the data.

Multiple researchers and coders allowed for imaginative variation to occur. It is here where the codes were then developed into themes. This was done through clustering particular codes that emerged from the data in order to make meaning of the experience or describe the essential structures of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002); the themes and codes that emerged from this study will be presented in Chapter 4. Synthesis of the information is the final step in inductive analysis and is important in order to provide a structure to the themes.
that emerged from the data and provide a perspective on pet loss and human bereavement; this is reported in the Chapter 5.

**Research team.** Credibility of the results of this study was enhanced through having a research team with training in qualitative design. The research team was comprised of three individuals that were either currently enrolled in or graduated from the same Counselor Education doctoral program at a large, southeastern, research one institution. All of the researchers noted a history of pet ownership and/or loss. The researchers represented male and female gender identities and were from various geographic locations prior to enrollment in the doctoral program. Due to the phenomenological nature of the research, it is assumed that the researchers have a working knowledge of the literature and therefore previous research conducted on pet loss and bereavement by the primary investigator was made available to each member of the team. The researchers noted some feelings of sadness while reviewing the data due to their current companion animal bonds and thoughts of imminent death, or in one case experience with death during the research, as well as noted an increased personal awareness of future final wishes for any current or future companion animal.

**Training for research team.** Credibility of results can be derived from the training in which the members of the research team received prior to the study. All three members of the research team were also students of a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Other Related Programs (CACREP) accredited Counselor Education program. As such, all programs that are accredited must include educational content in 8 areas, one of which is assessment (CACREP, 2009). The three research team members successfully completed
courses in quantitative analysis (Statistics I & II) as well as a qualitative research graduate-level course offered through the Psychology department at the same institution.
Chapter 4: Results

Research on pet loss and bereavement, as stated in previous chapters, has been unable to provide depth to the factors that contribute to common patterns in the lived experiences of individuals facing the death of a companion animal. This study sought to gather a rich description of the lived experiences of multicultural individuals who have experienced death of a companion animal in order to provide insight into the similarities and differences of the phenomenon of pet loss and bereavement, specifically in relation to human animal attachment and how one’s worldview can shape this process. The following research questions guided the inductive analysis of the results: (a) what are the lived experiences of pet owners who have experienced the loss of a companion animal; (b) what are the similarities and differences of human animal attachment as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners; and (c) what are the similarities and differences in how one’s worldview shapes mourning over the death of a companion animal as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners?

This chapter outlines the associations made by the research team, specifically, the codes and themes that emerged from the data through imaginative variation. An introduction to the synthesis of the information addresses how these themes may influence each other and is presented in a visual form to allow for a deeper understanding of the human bereavement a multicultural sample experiences after the death of a companion animal.

Data Analysis

As stated previously, inductive analysis guided the interpretation of results in this research. Researchers began with epoche, or bracketing, of biases before any analysis of the
data were initiated. This provided a layer of validity in the results that are presented on the topic of pet loss and human bereavement. Although validity is primarily seen as a quantitative factor that creates credible results from the data acquired, it can also be utilized in its general meaning to ensure that results from qualitative data represent the meanings derived from the spoken word of the participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). In an effort to address the validity of the current study, the researchers participated in multiple actions to ensure that the spoken words of the participants were truly the driving factor for the analysis. Additionally, the research team participated in reflexive journaling in order to complete validity checks at the research team meetings; this enabled the team to look at any personal feelings about the topic of pet loss and ensure that their beliefs did not emerge in the data analysis. The primary investigator also calculated a Kappa score to test inter-rater reliability (Vries, Elliot, Kanouse, & Teleki, 2008) for the research team that coded the semi-structured interviews.

Responses from the semi-structured interviews were solely utilized to address the first research question, whereas in order to address the last two research questions information from the descriptive statistics were incorporated into the data from the semi-structured interview in order to differentiate the similarities and differences that existed from the multicultural participant sample in an attempt to provide a common description of this phenomenon. Participants are described individually in order to provide a basis in which to introduce aspects of a shared experience of a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners. Participant characteristics provide a description of the sample and are provided before the information on the themes and codes.
In order to present the information in a logical manner, this chapter begins with a description of the participants. It is important for the analysis to provide a thorough description of the participants individually. This may not allow the researcher or reader to make generalizations solely on the basis of multiculturalism; however, it is the start to achieving common characteristics of the process of grieving over the loss of a companion animal. After a description of the participants, the data analysis is outlined and each theme that emerged from the data is described including: the research question the theme best addressed and the codes that fell under each theme with direct quotations. A brief introduction into the perceived similarities and differences will be addressed for research questions two and three; a further conclusion to these similarities and differences will be provided in Chapter 5 where the final step, or synthesis, of inductive analysis will be completed. Finally, the validity of the study will be addressed through providing information about the steps taken to ensure this study maintained a strict procedural process in order to avoid questions to the results and a Kappa score was calculated for the research team. The summary at the end of the results introduces the reader to the synthesis of results that will be presented in Chapter 5.

**Participant Characteristics.** One of the main goals of this research was to gather a multicultural sample of participants; this information will be outlined in the following section. The descriptive information about the participants include not only information gathered from the demographic form but also some information from the semi-structured interview. In order to make the participant feel more comfortable about speaking freely about the experience of losing a companion animal, warm up questions were asked. The
participants were gathered through purposeful sampling and snowballing; all of the
participants have, at one point in their lives, experienced the loss of a companion animal and
therefore were recruited to participate in this study.

The six participants represented a variety of races/ethnicities, martial and household
status, and geographic locations. The participants were equal in gender identity
representation and all identified as heterosexual. Although the sample size is small, half of
the participants were male. This is important as much of the research conducted on pet loss
and bereavement have found that more Caucasian women choose to participate in this type of
research (Field, et al., 2009; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). All but one of the participants spoke
about their companion animal relationships with canines; this is representative of the
population of individuals in the United States who own a companion animal with more
individuals living with at least one canine (HSUS, 2009).

Participants were asked to create a code to aid in protecting their identity. Many of
the participants included the pet in which they were grieving in the code, which could have
divulged personal information about the participants and lead to a lack of anonymity. For
this reason, the primary investigator decided not to utilize the participant-created code and
rather labeled the participants in order of completed interviews (Participant 1, Participant 2,
etc.). It was important to the primary investigator to provide a thorough description of each
participant, and therefore, rather than providing a composite description of the participants
individuals descriptions will be outlined.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 was an Asian female hailing from Bombay, India aged
41-45 who practices the Hindu religion. She identified as a heterosexual, married woman
who resides with her spouse and child/children in Cary, NC. She is employed in education and holds a bachelor’s degree. The companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a female, intact, purebred Pomeranian canine; she was the first companion animal for the participant. Participant 1 noted that she had always wanted a companion animal and the opportunity was presented to her when a new batch of puppies was born to a family friend. When naming the companion animal, the participant noted that the meaning behind her name was a direct relation to the definition of a princess; something that the companion animal represented in her actions and appearance. The companion animal was approximately 15 years old at time of passing and it had been approximately seven years since the death of the companion animal; the death seemed to be both expected due to age and sudden as she seemed to be in good health before becoming ill. In the lifespan of the companion animal, the participant noted that approximately $125, or 5000 Rupees, had been spent on routine health maintenance, caring for the illness, and other miscellaneous items. The semi-structured interview for participant one was conducted face-to-face.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 was an African American or Black female originally from Wayne County, NC aged 50+ that identified as a non-denominational Christian. She identified as a heterosexual, married woman who resided with her spouse and child/children in Knightdale, NC. She works in education and holds a master’s degree. The companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a male, intact, purebred Labrador Retriever canine; this was not the first experience with a companion animal and the participant noted that other animals were present throughout childhood that were seen as food rather than a pet. When asked about acquisition of the companion animal, she noted
that it was a spur of the moment decision and unplanned. Naming this companion animal derived from the perception of apparent intelligence of the canine. The companion animal was approximately five months old at its death, which appeared to be sudden, and at the time of the study 23 years had passed since the death. Participant 2 disclosed that approximately $2500 had been spent caring for the companion animal, including treatment for his illness. This semi-structured interview was completed face-to-face.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 was a Caucasian or White male who has resided in Boston, MA his whole life aged 36-40 who practices the Catholic religion. He identified as a heterosexual, single man who resides with his parent or in-law. He holds a bachelor’s degree and at the time of the study was unemployed. The companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a male, altered (neutered), purebred Boxer canine; he was not the first companion animal for the participant. Participant 3 noted that he had begun searching for a Boxer after multiple losses in his life and sought out the particular characteristics that were represented by this particular companion animal. When naming the companion animal, the participant noted that he wanted to pay tribute to two close friends who had recently passed away and therefore the name is a combination of the two individuals who had died. The companion animal was approximately eight years and nine months old at time of passing and it had been approximately five weeks since the death of the companion animal; the death seemed to sudden as he seemed to be in good health before becoming ill. In the lifespan of the companion animal, the participant noted that approximately $15-20,000 had been spent on routine health maintenance, caring for the illness, and other miscellaneous items. The semi-structured interview for Participant 3 was conducted over the telephone.
Participant 4. Participant 4 was an Asian female hailing from Nagoya, Japan aged 36-40 who practices the Christian religion. She identified as a heterosexual, single woman who resides alone in Boston, MA. She is employed in real estate and holds a master’s degree. The companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a female, altered (spayed), purebred Siamese feline; she was not the first companion animal for the participant through reporting a history of feline relationships throughout life. Participant 4 noted that she acquired this companion feline after the death of both of her parents who were the companion feline’s previous caregivers. When naming the companion animal, the participant noted that since she had taken responsibility of caring for the feline that her parents had originally named the companion animal. The companion animal was approximately 12-15 years old at time of passing and it had been approximately six months since the death of the companion animal; the death seemed to be both expected due to age and sudden as she seemed to be in good health before becoming ill. In the lifespan of the companion animal, the participant noted that approximately a sum of $6000+ had been spent on routine health maintenance, caring for the illness, and other miscellaneous items. The semi-structured interview for Participant 4 was conducted via Skype©. The day that this interview took place was also the day that the primary investigator’s canine had passed away after a long battle with bone cancer.

Participant 5. Participant 5 was a Caucasian or White male originally from Detroit, MI aged 36-40 who is not religiously affiliated. He identified as a heterosexual, married man who resides with his spouse, child/children and grandparent/grandparent-in-law in Norfolk, MA. He is employed in the home insurance industry and holds a bachelor’s degree. The
companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a male, altered, purebred Chinese Sharpei canine; he was not the first companion animal for the participant as he reported having both a feline and canine in the household while he was growing up.

Participant 5 noted that he and his fiancée at the time had decided to obtain a companion animal as a test for parenthood and they began to research breeders in order to acquire a well-bred canine companion. When naming the companion animal, the participant noted that the breeders had named the canine because he had a likeness to an individual in the breeders’ lives and after the participant and his fiancée met the canine they decided to keep the name he was given. The companion animal was approximately 13 years old at time of passing and it had been approximately one year since the death of the companion animal; the death seemed to be expected due to age. In the lifespan of the companion animal, the participant noted that approximately $10,000 had been spent on routine health maintenance, caring for the illness, and other miscellaneous items. The semi-structured interview for Participant 5 was conducted via Skype ©.

Participant 6. Participant 6 was a Caucasian or White male originally from Winchester, MA aged 50+ who noted that he was a non-practicing Catholic. He identified as a heterosexual, divorced and remarried man who resides with his spouse and child/children in New Britain, CT. He is employed in retail and holds a bachelor’s degree. The companion animal that was the focus of our conversation was a female, altered, purebred Labrador Retriever canine; she was the first companion animal for the participant. Participant 6 noted that he and his first wife had decided to acquire the companion animal as a test for future children and was a house-warming gift from his sister. When naming the companion animal,
the participant noted that they referenced a baby name book in order to find a name that was fitting for their companion animal. The companion animal was approximately 13 years old at time of passing and it had been approximately nine years since the death of the companion animal; the death seemed to be both expected due to age and sudden as she seemed to be in good health before becoming ill with throat cancer. In the lifespan of the companion animal, the participant noted that approximately $15-20,000 had been spent on routine health maintenance, caring for the illness, and other miscellaneous items. The semi-structured interview for Participant 6 was conducted over the telephone.

**Imaginative variation.** In order to interpret the transcripts or data, inductive analysis was utilized as described by Moustakas (1994). Before conducting the study, the research team participating in bracketing in order to make transparent any notions or biases about the phenomenon of interest. From there, once the interviews were completed and the participants verified the transcripts and spoken word for accuracy, the research team individually coded the data from the semi-structured interviews. Except for the primary investigator, the demographic information was unknown at the time of coding the transcripts. The individual coding of the data is what Moustakas (1994) refers to as phenomenological reduction; researchers went through each transcript and looked for meaningful data that was relevant to the phenomenon of pet loss and bereavement. These codes were represented by a word or phrase that the individual research felt best described the statements made by the participants.

Once individual codes were established, the team met to develop one common code list in order to complete one last coding of the data. After the second coding was completed,
the research team met once again to initiate imaginative variation; this is where meaning is made from the data in order to cluster codes into themes that are representative of the lived experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). It was believed by the research team that three specific themes emerged from the data: *internal process, bond, and social influence*. After developing these themes, the research team discussed how each code was relevant to the themes that emerged and what each theme represented, being careful to utilize the spoken words and meanings of the participants. Significant statements were made by the participants that described the process of grieving the death of a companion animal; the researchers gathered that the most influential factor in how one processed this experience involved one’s support system, or social influence. In order to analyze the data, the research questions were utilized as a guideline for interpretation and for each of the following themes a specific research question will be addressed following with a description of each code using excerpts from the data.

**Internal process.** Internal process was described by each of the participants and therefore answered research question one: what are the lived experiences of pet owners who have experienced the loss of a companion animal? One’s internal process was seen as what the individual emotionally and physically experienced secondary to the loss of a companion animal. It was in this theme that many of the stages of Kübler-Ross’ Model of Grief emerged and therefore, associations were made by explicitly labeling codes that aligned with this stage theory. Dealing with the loss of an important attachment figure is a personal, and sometimes private experience, and was the focus of the study. The manner in which one processes this experience was found to be individual, however many overlapping codes emerged from the
multicultural sample of grieving pet owners and it was determined that one’s process can be influenced by one’s worldview or society. Not only did components of the Model of Grief emerge from the data, but also Bowlby’s theory on attachment and loss. Figure 2 shows a graphic representation of the internal process theme; it was depicted in this manner as to not make one code more important than another but rather all are components to the internal process of grieving the loss of a companion animal.

This section will address and define each of the codes that best represented one’s internal process of losing a companion animal. It was important to the research to utilize the spoken words of the participants in order to provide examples of how these associations were made by the research team, and adds to the authenticity of the experience.
**Acceptance.** Acceptance was defined as the decision to euthanize a companion animal to ease the pain, any mention of acceptance of impeding death, and any actions or activities taken by the pet parent in order to provide one last shared experience with the companion animal. Acceptance is seen in the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief and refers to one’s acceptance of impeding death; being at one with the news that death is imminent (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Acceptance was seen in all but one of the participant accounts (Participant 3) and can be associated with the manner in which the companion animal died as he was not euthanized and died of a terminal illness independent of veterinarian actions. The companion animal in the case of Participant 1 was also not euthanized, however she reported the acceptance with the death of the companion animal by stating “It just-time. Says. They say that time heals wounds. So maybe that’s what has happened.” when mentioning coping with the death.

The remaining participants expressed acceptance in their decision to euthanize their companion animal in order to ease the pain and suffering of the animal. Participant 2 stated “…so I agreed because I know-I had watched him be vivacious and jumping around and I watched him go-ah-almost nothing. So I agreed to have him put down…” Similar statements were made by Participants 4 through 6 in regards to the decision to euthanize their companion animal. Participant 4 noted that the veterinarian stated that “…you can tell she’s really struggling and if you have a heart, you just have to let her go” in making the final decision to euthanize her feline companion this really stuck with her and she stated that “…if I love her I really need to let her go” and that the death was “…good timing I guess or God’s will”. Participant 5 noted that “…you know it was an easy choice, it was the right choice,
and then after the difficulty of the actual events, you know you immediately start feeling better” and that “…there’s a lot more clarity, a lot less crying and sort of like a surreal-ness for a few minutes and then you realize that it’s sort of time to think about life after [companion animal].”

Participant 6 made similar statements in relation to the decision and timing to euthanize his canine companion, especially since she was diagnosed with throat cancer. In preparation to the “…two week time frame from when the time we heard that we were going to have to put her down…” and that since “…she loved the beach-so right down to the afternoon we put her down we went to the beach first. She did swimming, running in a driving rain storm”. This represented the companion animal parent’s desire to enjoy one last shared experience in a way of accepting the fact that death was imminent.

_Bargaining._ Bargaining was defined in this experience as the bereaved turned to a higher power when dealing with the loss of the companion animal or bargained with self in feeling as is more could have been done in the wake of the death. This theme was not as salient in the participants’ accounts of their experience of companion animal death, however was pervasive enough to warrant an individual code. The description of bargaining in this case is in some ways similar to the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief definition in that there is no bargaining with another human being but rather with a higher power. Participant 4 noted that she “[and her partner] said a prayer…” while her feline companion was being euthanized and that rather than preparing for the death after hearing that she would die was “…like praying away, I was even like speak in tongue, everything”.


The research team added a component to the definition of bargaining as it was introduced by Kübler-Ross as it did not address bargaining with self over the death or that euthanasia was the right thing for the companion animal. Two of the participants (Participants 3 and 5) noted that they wish they could have done more in preparation of the death of their canine companions. Participant 3 said, “…I felt like I could’ve done more for him. I didn’t do-like I could’ve taken him for more walks, taken him more places, done more things with him, which is odd because I did a ton with him”. Participant 5 voiced his bargaining over the choice to euthanize his canine companion in his experience “…you regret your choice and you think it’s crazy…and then um, you get a sort of sense that they’re at peace from their discomfort”.

Continued bond. One’s continued bond with the deceased is a manner in which one can pay tribute to the lost attachment figure and foster adjustment as iterated by Bowlby (1980). The definition used in this study was the utilization of a variety of methods of remembering the companion animal through burial or cremation or honoring the companion animal through giving back to the earth or community in their memory. All but one of the participants (Participant 2) noted some manner in which they paid tribute to their companion animal after death; however this participant noted that the companion animal stayed at the veterinarian’s office after he was euthanized rather than coming home with her.

There were a variety of ways in which the participants that did continue the bond with the deceased companion animal paid tribute, and many of the participants did this through multiple actions. Participant 1 buried her “at the same playground where should would-we would take her for a walk…they wrapped her up in a nice, clean cloth, and then my uncle
took her to the playground where she goes for a walk and plays with other dogs”. Participant 3 stated, “I’ve made a PowerPoint and video, I’ve done that it’s almost complete. And I have his ashes in a nice cedar box and everything.” He also took another approach of continuing a bond with his lost canine companion by mating him “…so he lives on through the puppies.” Participant 5 put pictures “…intentionally…together in a little tribute” and is reassured with “…the fact that he’s buried so close to us sort of overlooking our home…” he also adorned the site with “…a circle of rocks around them up on the hill.”

Keeping of ashes is a tangible reminder to a loss. Many individuals keep human ashes of those important to them and this can be expected in human animal relationships as well. Participant 3 retrieved the box containing the ashes of her feline companion during the interview and noted that she also had a “…picture like this right next to it.” Participant 6 noted “…she’s in a canister next to my right” and that he also paid tribute through “…a Dogwood tree in my sister’s yard that I planted in her memory.”

Denial. One way to process the experience of a loss, in the wake of learning about it, is to deny the inevitable. In this study, denial was observed as keeping busy with distractions, avoiding the situation, and an outward display of disbelief in the imminent death. Denial is also seen in the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief as the dying and close individuals do not accept the inevitable death and deny the fact that one’s life is going to end and therefore there is a lack of preparation, both mentally and tangibly. Once again, participants many times exhibited multiple actions they took that focused on denying the death of their companion animal. Participant 2 “…didn’t really believe…” the veterinarian when she learned that her companion canine needed to be euthanized as she “…knew
something was wrong but I thought it was something that could be fixed.” She also kept herself busy in order to help cope with the death as she “…had so much work to do.”

Preparing for a loss is one way in which an individual can lessen the pain felt secondary to the death of an important figure. A lack of preparation was verbalized in how some of the participants denied that fact that their companion animal was close to the end of their life. Participant 3 “…didn’t prepare for it to tell you the truth” even though he knew that his canine had cancer. Participant 4 also states that after turning to a higher power that “…you know [companion animal] is going to live…” whereas Participant 6 noted that “…she was getting older but she still had puppy tendencies” and kept busy by going to work and was thankful to have “…had some young kids in the house because they helped occupy the time that I would normally would have had with the dog.” Keeping oneself busy with other things is a defense mechanism in order to help alleviate the pain that can be felt after the loss of an important attachment figure but can also can lead to a more intense pain when those feeling are dealt with.

Depression. All of the participants noted that they had exhibited mostly emotional signs and symptoms of sadness in the wake of the companion animal death. This is very similar to Kübler-Ross’ model as one begins to think about what life will be like after death. Crying emerged as the most common display of emotion for this sample of grieving pet owners (Participants 1, 4, 5, and 6). Participant 4 even noted that she was “…crying at inappropriate places. I’m crying at work, crying everywhere” and Participant 5 “…just cried…I’m like a crying mess.” Participant 6 went even further in describing this outward
display of depression by stating that he “…had a very, very difficult time leaving the room. Um broke down completely.”

Participants 2 and 3 noted a difference in their depressive feelings after the loss of their companion animals that did not necessarily mention crying, however still fit into the definition of depression. Participant 2 stated that immediately following the death she “…was not good. I was really sad. And um-it was just hard—and depressing” and Participant 3 related the experience to taking “…the wind out of my sails and slowed me down a bit for the past month or so.” Any break in normal, everyday activities is just one example of how one exhibits depression and it doesn’t need to be something that others can see.

**Improved self.** Improved self was an interesting code that emerged from the data. The researchers described by this code as any mention of self-growth or personal development that was a direct result of having a companion animal relationship and going through the loss of this relationship. Bowlby (1980) states that this is a process of reorganizing one’s life after loss through redefining oneself. Not all of the participants iterated taking something positive away from this experience, however it was evident in a majority of the sample. Some ways in which the companion animal relationship and loss helped the participants was “…he gave me purpose, helped me get out of the depression from a family loss” (Participant 3); “…she definitely put such great happiness and joy in my family, you know, and she actually made me learn a lot about grieving so I-I thank her a lot” (Participant 4); being “…better because of it all” (Participant 5); and that “…speaking to others actually helped me grow” (Participant 6) in reference to sharing his experience with
others. The experience of having a relationship with a companion animal and dealing with
the loss can aid individuals in gaining life skills and in some ways help in making self-
improvements.

*Noted Absence.* Adjusting to the absence of an important figure in one’s life can take
some time especially in the early days after death; it is also a manner in which one
reorganizes their behaviors (Bowlby, 1973). A noted absence was indicated by many of the
participants as both a lack of physical presence as well as having to adjust one’s habits of
expecting the companion animal to be in a certain place after the loss. There can appear to be
“…a void in the house. When I got home there was nothing there…” (Participant 2) and
sharing of time together “…like when we were having dinner, lunch—she was always there
with us and all of a sudden she was just not there…” (Participant 1).

Two of the participants spoke in detail and length about the absence of the companion
animal in their accounts and how they needed to be, in a sense, reconditioned to life without
a companion animal:

“I would come home and that’s when I would notice like he wasn’t there or—well—if
you don’t see. If you have a dog and your dog always lays in certain places around
the house, for instance, you lose that dog, you’re still thinking that dog is laying there.
So, I would find myself—if I couldn’t see [companion animal], stepping over areas
where I thought he was. Or say I would throw my remote control on my bed and like
‘oh, [companion animal]’ thinking I’d hit him with the remote control so I kept
imagining after the days that he was there—or not imagining just I was conditioned that
he was still there…”-Participant 3
“Um, there’s an emptiness, right. Of course the sound-his claws on the hardwood and the expectation when the doorbell rings, someone gets down the driveway, that you’re going to have like the, ah, blood pressure going up because there’s this level of chaos all of a sudden of anxiety about who’s entering, and then all of a sudden you miss this um canine mindset that your dog mandates by being such a um, you know he’s a 90 pound presence in a you know open floor plan.”       -Participant 5

**Bond.** The second theme that emerged from the data seemed to represent an attachment bond with a companion animal and best answered the research question: what are the similarities and differences of human animal attachment as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners? Figure 3 illustrates the codes that fell under “Bond” and similarly to the “Internal Process” theme are represented as to not create a hierarchy of the codes. The description of this theme is presented in such a way that first addresses the codes that fell under the bond theme and then presents information about the similarities and differences that were illustrated by the participants.
Avoidance. Individuals learn from past experiences, and therefore, in the case of pet loss and human bereavement some individuals may choose to avoid situations that may cause further pain associated with a prior loss. Avoidance described the purposeful choice of remaining without a companion animal due to fear of another loss. This code was only observed in three of the participants’ accounts, however proved significant in how the first loss impacted future companion animal relationships. Participant 1 stated, “It was hard for us to replace her…I don’t feel like I could go through that again.” Likewise, Participant 2 avoided getting another dog right away and also noted, “…I try not to let myself to get attached to any other pets.” It seems that the memory of the loss can lead one to the life
decision to not become attached again and protect oneself from future pain and suffering. Participant 6 waited “…a solid four years before I could even entertain the idea of having another pet in the house” making evident that he took much time into the decision to acquire another companion animal.

Beginning of attachment. Every individual companion animal parent can remember how the relationship with a companion animal began, especially if they acquired them as an adult. Beginning of attachment was defined as how the companion animal was acquired and it was not surprising, and rather expected, that each participant could describe this experience. However, the reasons behind and manners in which the companion animal was acquired appeared to be unique for each participant. For many of the participants, acquisition was planned. Participant 1 noted that they had always wanted a pet and “…one of my mom’s friends had puppies and she wanted to give them away because she couldn’t look after them all, so we bought one.” Participants 3 and 5 spent time and thought on the right companion animal through “…searching around for Boxers with certain characteristics…” (Participant 3) and “…we wanted a reputable breeder and that took us all the way to New Jersey to find someone really well respected.” (Participant 5)

Three of the participants received their companion animals through possibly unconventional methods. Participant 4 took on responsibility for caring for her companion feline after her “…mom passed away, you know I can’t let her go anywhere else.” Participant 6’s “sister gave her to use as a housewarming gift” and then after ending his first marriage “When we divorced-when we separated and divorced, ah [companion animal] came with me.” Only Participant 2 noted that she was not really looking for a companion animal at
the time she acquired him from “…the flea market one Sunday, and they had little puppies, Labs. And ah, they were so cute and I took one home with me. I didn’t intend to do that but I did.”

_End of attachment._ Similar to the beginning of attachment, all of the participants were found to also speak about the end of their attachment. This is expected as the phenomenon of interest dealt with pet loss and human bereavement. Although each of the participants spoke about the loss of their attachment bond the reasons behind this end had some uniqueness as to the manner in which death/euthanasia occurred. Some of the participants noted that the death of their companion animal was due to age and illness that comes with getting older. For one participant, however, the illness of their companion canine occurred early in the life of the canine. Participant 2’s canine “…was very sick and he has distemper…effecting his nervous system…” This was shocking to the participant as the age of her companion canine was just five months old.

The remaining participants had the experience of their companion animal living a long life but toward the end of their life cycle had gotten ill. Participant 1’s canine “…had been sick, so we took her to the vet but the vet couldn’t figure out what was wrong with her.” Participant 3’s experience was slightly different in that “…his spleen had burst. So he had to have emergency surgery” and it turned out after operating that “…he was pretty much riddled with cancer…” Participants 4 and 6 had also brought their companion animal to their veterinarian to find out that there was sickness that had plagued their companions.

Participant 5 believed that the demise of his companion canine was secondary to their age. “Ah, he was gradual-gradually in more and more pain over like an eight month period.
You know, he was a very old dog so it was just a matter of when we thought we were ready to let go.”

_Equivalencies._ Anthropomorphism occurs when human characteristics or traits are ascribed to a non-human object. All of the participants saw their companion animal as human equivalents, describing companion animal roles that would normally by used for humans, including attributing family or human likeness and mentioning treatment of their companion animal as if they were a human. There was a range, however, in how they made equivalent statements about their companion animal where some mentioned that their roles as either a family member or as best friends.

Participant 6 mentioned that getting his companion canine as a good way to prepare for eventual children; thus helping to reinforce the responsibility that one takes on as a parent. This participant also described the role his companion canine as a parent/child relationship. Participant 5 recalled a similar experience in one of the reasons for acquiring his companion canine, however he described his bond as parent/child, sibling and friendship; making several references to how he was like a human. “[Companion animal] was always sort of the first born and sort of the king of it all” and that he was “…truly my best friend” and referred to him as “…a brother.” He also stated, “…I attribute as much goodness and greatness into the dog as I do a person…”

Participant 1 believed that her companion canine was “…a family member. She didn- we didn’t treat her as a pet. She was like one of our own.” Participant 2 stated that her companion canine was a friend and that companion animals “…are like little people.” This was also iterated by Participant 3 in that “…he was just a great friend…a really good friend
to have around” and Participant 4 noted that she “…was like a sister, a sister that meows.” It is evident that human characteristics are many times placed on companion animals and there are a variety of ways in which humans think of their companion animals as just like them.

**Linking object.** A less common occurring code that emerged from the data was linking the companion animal to another person, as if the companion canine represented the memory of an important human figure in one’s life. For two of the participants this was reported as any mention of thinking the companion animal to previous grief. Participant 4 noted previously that she had obtained her companion feline shortly after the death of two important figures in her life, her parents. Her bond to her companion feline represented “…this wonderful, precious memory…” of her parents that she could take back with her to the U.S. and that “she’s this living, breathing thing who just knows my dad and mom. Um, so by the time I found out she’s sick, and all that stuff, it’s like losing my mom and dad all over again.”

Participant 3 had also shared his experience with human loss soon before acquiring his companion canine. He obtained his companion canine after “…a couple of friends of mine passed away” and that in choosing a name for him he decided to pay tribute to those individuals by using a combination of their names. Keeping a connection with previous important attachment figures be it human or animal, is a way of maintaining a bond with their memory.

**Similarities and differences.** Within the description of each of the codes that represent the Bond theme, it was made evident that there were similarities and differences in one’s bond with their companion animal and the story of their relationship; this can be seen in
Figure 4. One of the goals of this research was to determine if there are commonalities in the experience of losing a companion animal among a multicultural population in the hopes that helping professionals and companion animal parents can have a transparent depiction of what one may expect to experience in the wake of a loss.

Social influence. The third, and final, theme that emerged from the data dealt with the worldview of the participants in working through the loss of a companion animal and best addressed the final research question: what are the similarities and differences in how one’s worldview shapes mourning over the death of a companion animal as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners? One’s support system can influence the comfort level that one has in openly grieving the loss of a companion animal. This theme addresses the support systems of the bereaved and can lead to possible explanations as to
why some individuals choose to grieve alone. Western society has been believed to disvalue the bond between humans and their companion animals and therefore can also impact the grieving process (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). Similarly to the previous two themes, a visual graph has been used to show the codes that led to the creation of the Social Influence theme (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Illustration of the Social Influence Theme

Advice givers. Only one of the participants noted that they felt the need to process the experience of losing their companion animal alone due to the influence of others. It was believed by the research team that although this was a unique perspective of one of the participants that it was critical to the process of grieving the loss for this particular
participant. Advice givers referred to uncomfortable others that do not provide understanding or empathy in the wake of the loss of the companion animal. Participant 2 spoke frequently of this population in her life and how it shaped who she felt comfortable sharing the grief she was experiencing with. Her husband and family urged her to obtain another dog and even stated that they said “oh let’s go shopping-you’ll get over anything, you know get a pair of shoes, it’ll be good.” This does not depict a support system that shows empathy to their family member who was facing an important loss in their life and could be one of the underlying reasons that she did not feel comfortable going to her close family members to speak about what she was experiencing.

Coercion. Coercion was defined as the lack of support in dealing with grief and represented the inability to openly grieve due to fear of others’ perceptions or lack of support. As with the previous code of Advice Givers, Coercion was not as evident in all of the participants’ accounts and was mostly illustrated by an individual who demonstrated that she had a poor support system or a perception of a lack of support. For Participant 2, there were multiple mentions of this coercion from a range of individuals in her life: her partner, her siblings, and her employers. When speaking of her partner, she mentioned that “…he shows his emotions is kind of odd anyways, so, he just is manly, posturing thing that he does, so it’s hard for me to tell how he was impacted.” Her siblings also coerced an outward bereavement for this participant “…so they didn’t really get it so I didn’t really tell them a lot. I don’t generally talk a lot about my um, when I get depressed. I figure I have to deal with it myself so I go inside myself to find my answers.” Additionally, she stated that her workplace “…barely accommodated me. I think I could have died and they’d kept me in that chair. No,
I don’t even think that they were award that I had a pet that had a problem.” The inability to turn to a positive support system can impact how one will resolve the grief that they are experiencing and therefore it is essential for individuals to seek out caring others when bereaving the loss of an important figure.

*Positive support.* A positive support system can greatly aid an individual experiencing many life situations. Positive support was defined as any mention of compassion, empathy and understanding of loss by others and was seen in all but Participant 2’s account of the experience of losing a companion animal. Participant 1 spoke about how others in her life were impacted at the news of the loss of her companion canine; “People who knew her—they were hurt too. Because many people were calling and saying ‘oh, what happened to [companion animal]?’” This displayed the notion that not only individuals who had direct, daily contact with the lost companion canine were grieving the loss but also extended family members and friends.

Other participants spoke frequently about important individuals and friends that showed empathy for the loss by being involved in their own bereavement. Participants mentioned ways in which friends and family members showed this outpouring of support and sadness over the loss through sending cards, making phone calls and posting on social networking sites. Participant 3 “…got a lot of sympathy—I got cards, phone calls, Facebook© posts—a lot of love was sent my way. A lot of people missed him.”

Participant 5 noted that he had multiple layers of positive support in that he received cards from individuals consoling him in the wake of his loss and that his “…father-in-law who was close to [companion animal] you know helped me bury him…” and that he didn’t
have “…any issue with you know me sobbing like a child…”. He also mentioned that his partner “…is awesome in that she steps up in those situations. I don’t expect it-you know we talked so much about the moment and the time to do it.” Even his workplace was understanding of the situation and provided him with flexibility if needed.

Remaining participants who noted a positive support system had multiple layers as evidence. Participant 4 sought “…out someone from my church, and we have ah, grievance counselors so I went there and, yeah, it really helped me tons.” She was also accommodated in her workplace and felt comfortable informing her boss that she was “…completely useless…” and needed him to step in for her and take her clients. As Participant 4 is far away from her family, she noted that the support she gained from her partner’s family was overwhelmingly supportive. “[His] family actually all came over.” “They were all praying for me and they were just really nice people. Um, so ironically with this kind of tragedy I found other people’s warmth and comfortable level with me.”

Participant 6 mimicked many of the same experiences in that “…even my sister’s husband got emotional with the fact that this was their opportunity to say goodbye”, “my sister and her husband, that affected them as well.” He was also given the opportunity if needed to take time off from work, but due to the timing this was not necessary in his case. A strong support system has the ability to aid one in openly grieving the loss of an important figure and also acknowledge that there is validity to grieving this type of loss.

**Selective.** Sharing one’s experience, or news of a loss, can be done based on many factors. Selective was defined as the fear of disclosing the loss to others due to the response or lack of response that one expects. Although some of the participants noted both a positive
support system they also noted that they were selective in sharing their loss with others. Participant 1 stated that she had a hard time saying anything to anyone about her loss. Participant 3 “wasn’t comfortable but told everyone” about his loss. Participant 2 exuded the true essence of selective sharing in that “for the people who I thought understood, how you could be attached to a pet, I talked a lot about it. But for people, most people who were around me who didn’t have pets, couldn’t care less.” The choice to share life’s losses with others is impacted by present individuals.

Unfiltered. The opposite of being selective would be to share one’s loss in an unfiltered manner. Unfiltered represents comfort in processing companion animal loss with others and sharing of the event without hesitation. Only one participant (Participant 3) noted both the presence of selective and unfiltered sharing in his experience in that “…I felt like he was a really loved dog, an awesome dog, and people would want to know.” This fact can be viewed as one reason as to why he felt somewhat selective in sharing his loss but that others who were close to his companion canine would be impacted by the news and therefore, he felt a duty to share.

Aside from one individual (Participant 2), the remaining participants mentioned that they felt comfortable by telling others about the death of their companion animal. Participant 4 was “…comfortable. I’m pretty much comfortable telling people about my losing loved ones.” Participants 5 and 6 made almost identical statements when prompted with their comfort level in telling others about their loss.

Similarities and differences. The similarities and differences in one’s societal influence in grieving the loss of a companion animal are not as clear and organized as those
represented in their Bond. It appears that among the participants, there was one outlier (Participant 2) and that her social influence was great and definitely impacted her ability to openly grieve the loss of her companion canine. Similarities could be seen in one’s support system for a majority of the participants and in the comfort level of sharing one’s experience with others; however even in this respect not all participants reported the same experience. Figure 6 presents a visual depiction of these similarities and differences.

![Figure 6: Illustration of Similarities and Differences of Social Influence Theme](image)

**Validity.** One criticism of qualitative research involves the notion that there are no numbers utilized to ensure the accuracy of results. Many times, as qualitative researchers, there is an attempt to note the accuracy of results in quantitative measures (i.e., data, validity, etc.) even though due to the essence of qualitative research seeking the lived experience there is no true way to prove this (Polkinglore, 2006). There are, however, certain measures that a researcher can take in order to ensure that the essence of the lived experience is accurate, in
terms of the words of the researchers and that inferences are not made that are not already present in the interviews.

Patton (2002) states three ways in which qualitative research is reliable or valid: through using rigorous methodology, utilizing credible researchers, and maintaining a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. Validity was ensured through taking careful steps and precautions throughout the research process. Initially, before beginning to code the transcripts, the research team made available their preconceived notions about the phenomenon of interest. The research team was provided with the transcribed semi-structured interviews and reviewed this data for any reoccurring themes (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002), or coded the data, making sure to use a word or set of words in the margins of the documents in order to pick out important information related to pet loss and bereavement. Once an initial, independent coding was completed, the team met and developed a master code list (Appendix E). Additionally, the researchers met frequently in order to ensure that the coding was completed accurately and one’s biases were not represented in the transcript coding. Checks were completed at both research team meetings and any personal feelings regarding the process of coding the data were mentioned. All of the members of the research team noted the difficulty of coding the transcripts and the emotional tolls it took on them and how this process empowered them to think ahead to how they would deal with the death of their companion animals and how they would pay tribute after death.

**Kappa score.** In order to enhance the validity of the results, and ensure that there was a sense of reliability of the coding of transcripts, inter-rater agreement was assessed using
Kappa. A Kappa score will aid in evaluating inter-rater agreement, taking into account chance alone, of coding rates for each rater (Vries, Elliot, Kanouse, & Teleki, 2008). The Kappa scores for the semi-structured interviews are reflected in Table 1 and were 0.77; this is considered to be in the substantial category as described by Landis and Koch (1977) cited in Vries, Elliott, Kanouse, and Takeli (2008) and infers reliability in the coding of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of codes in each transcript</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>total codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher 1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher 2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher 3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Agreement                      | 14 | 17 | 23 | 21 | 32 | 21 | 128 |
| (number of matching codes)     |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |

Calculating Kappa

\[ K = \frac{\text{agreement} \times \# \text{of raters}}{\text{total codes}} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>agr’mnt (ag)</th>
<th># of raters (#)</th>
<th>(ag * #)</th>
<th>(ag*#)/total codes</th>
<th>Kappa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>384/500</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Inter-rater Reliability/Kappa Score Results

Summary

One of the main goals of this research was to interpret the lived experience of pet loss based on the spoken words of a multicultural group of grieving pet owners. Based on the information that was analyzed it appears that there are many commonalities of the process of
grief over the death of a companion animal; however, there are other factors that may impede the process. This chapter presented results, in way of themes and the codes that comprised each theme. It addressed each research questions and how the data was organized in order to answer each of these questions.

Of the six participants in this study, only one mentioned numerous accounts of a negative social influence. It is believed that this contributed to a poor experience of grieving over the death of her companion animal. The remaining participants noted that they had positive support and that, in turn, allowed them to openly grieve over the loss of an important attachment figure. Individuals facing this phenomenon will experience some of the highlighted stages of the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief, and this process is seen as an internal one. Based on the analysis of the data, it does appear that the themes do impact one another, although not reciprocally. Figure 7 introduces how it is believed that these themes interact with one another. This will be addressed in depth in Chapter 5 where the information gathered from this study is synthesized as suggested as the last step in inductive analysis.
Figure 7: Illustration of How Themes Impact One Another
Chapter 5: Discussion

The main goal of this study was to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of grieving pet owners. Through using a phenomenological qualitative research design, the study sought multicultural participants in the North and Southeastern United States to address questions about personal experiences with pet loss and bereavement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, transcribed for coding analysis, and the data were developed into emergent themes. Numerous steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the results including; statement of researchers’ biases’ prior to the study, member checking of the transcripts to ensure accuracy, and researcher journaling. Additionally, Kappa (see Chapter 4) was calculated to determine the reliability of the individual coding of the transcripts (i.e., the codes and essences that emerged from the data were consistent among the three members of the research team).

This chapter synthesizes and summarizes the results of this study and follows Moustakas’ (1994) outline for conducting inductive analysis of the data. This section will provide synthesis of the findings and relate them by theme to previous literature, discuss the limitations of the study, and present implications for mental health professionals and future research. An underlying goal of this particular study was to determine if one’s worldview impacts the intensity of the lived experience of grieving over the death of an important, non-human, attachment figure and determine the similarities and differences among a group of multicultural participants. It is hoped that this information can provide evidence to decrease the cynicism placed on death, especially the death of a companion animal, by society and place importance on common experiences individuals face when a companion animal dies.
Synthesis

A summary of significant findings will be presented in this chapter while also synthesizing the information to previous research. The goals of this research were: (1) to examine the lived experience of pet loss and human bereavement, (2) determine the similarities and differences in attachment of a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners, and (3) in one’s worldview and therefore an inductive analysis approach was used. Pet loss and human bereavement is becoming more popular in the mental health literature, however, it is still relatively new in this field of knowledge and more information is needed in order for counselors to assist clients resolving the grief that is experienced after companion animal death. Through utilizing an interpretive/constructivist approach the participants were provided with an avenue in which to make sense of the death and find positive meanings after loss, as posited by Boyraz and Bricker (2011) as validation for conducting research on this topic using this approach. Boyraz and Bricker stated that, “according to constructivist approach, the loss of a pet can be seen as an event that can challenge an individual’s way of understanding life and undermine ones self-narrative (pp. 389-90).”

Inductive analysis allowed for the findings to emerge from the raw data, as interpreted by the researchers and follows what Thomas (2006) described as the approach and primary purpose of using this type of analysis. He also stated three purposes underlying the development of this approach as being: (1) taking long transcripts of data and shortening it to a brief format, (2) making clear links between the research objectives and findings derived from the data, ensuring that they are both transparent and defendable, and (3) making meaning of the experiences that are evident in the data through model or theory development.
For these reasons as well as what was presented in the previous chapters, this was the ideal method to utilize for this study.

As introduced in Chapter 4, the data suggest that social influence is an important factor in understanding pet loss and human bereavement. It was found that social influence, or one’s worldview, can impact both the internal process of grieving over the death of a companion animal and the bond between the human and animal. The bond was also believed to have an influence on the internal process of this type of experience. Insights as to why these interactions are important will be presented through further analysis of each emergent theme; linking the findings to previous literature.

**Internal process.** The findings of this study provide insight into the lived experience of a diverse group of companion animal guardians in their coping with an important loss. Commonalities were found in this multicultural sample in how they coped with this loss; the research team found each of the codes in at least half of the participants’ narratives. The *internal process* theme best addressed the first research question of this study: what are the lived experiences of a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners? This question provided insight into what individuals face in the wake of the death of an important non-human living figure in their lives. Previous studies laid the foundation for studying this phenomenon through conducting descriptive research; however one in particular noted that much more knowledge about this life event could be attained through utilizing the participants’ words about this life altering event (Brown, et al., 1996).

For this group of participants, the lived experience of a grieving pet owner was found to have many similarities with the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief and confirms similar previous
findings of pet loss and human loss grief reactions to be equivalent (Clements, et al., 2003; McNicholas, et al., 2005). Acceptance, bargaining, denial and depression were those codes that emerged from the data that are also represented in the Model of Grief as described by Kübler-Ross (1969); anger was not found in the spoken accounts of the participants and will be addressed in the summary and implications for research. The remaining codes that emerged from the data under this theme include: continued bond, improved self, and noted absence and have direct links to previous research around the topic of death and bereavement of both a human (LaLande & Bonanno, 2006; Marshall & Sutherland, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2008; Valentine, 2010) and a companion animal (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Boyraz & Bricker, 2011; Clements, et al., 2003; McNicholas, et al., 2005; Torray, 2004).

Previous research on the topic of pet loss and bereavement stated that there is a correlation between a high level of attachment or bond with a companion animal (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Planchon, et al., 2002; Torray, 2004) and negative social influence (Clements, et al., 2003) and the amount of grief experienced after loss. One’s internal processing of this traumatic experience was affected by not only the bond with the companion animal but also by their worldview. Although this study did not seek information on the intensity of grief experienced, it was clear that social influence affected the ability to openly grieve with supportive others and will be further discussed later in the chapter; grief is a social process and without a presence of others that can understand and support the bereaved grief may not be resolved (Sife, 2005; Torray, 2004).

Although not all of the participants reported all of the codes that compromised the internal process theme, there is a common experience. This confirms what Kübler-Ross
found to be true; there are common components of grief that are all uniquely experienced (1969). All of the codes that comprised this theme are presented individually making links between the findings and previous research and addressing commonality in experience for the participants.

Acceptance. Acceptance of an imminent death can be one way in which an individual begins to process and heal from an expected loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969). For this group of participants, acceptance provided permission to move forward after learning that the relationship would be ending in the near future. Acceptance was seen in this population by agreeing to go through with their humanitarian obligation of removing pain and suffering by euthanizing the companion animal; they felt as though it was the right thing to do at that time. Not only was acceptance described by the participants as allowing themselves to go through with the euthanasia procedure that would end this important relationship but also as a means to provide one last positive memory between the guardian and companion animal; providing both the companion canine and the guardian with a dying wish.

In this sample, acceptance was found in a majority of the participants’ responses and was described similarly as a way to accept their decision to end the life of their companion and friend; many stated that it was the right time or the right thing to do. Participant 3 was the only one who did not report acceptance of the eventual death of his companion canine. In this specific case, although the companion canine was terminally ill he was not euthanized; he died in the arms of his guardian on the day that he was to be euthanized. Although this guardian did make plans to have his canine euthanized he did not have to make the final decision due to the circumstance. The companion animal guardian in this case was saved
from this difficult decision and is a potential reason as to why he did not report acceptance as a part of his internal process.

**Bargaining.** For half of the participants bargaining was mentioned as part of their lived experience and internal process of grieving the loss of their companion animal. Participants 3 and 5 described this experience as an internal bargaining; did they do as much as they could to save their significant canine? Clements, et al. (2003) states that guilt can impact the grieving process as individuals feel as though they failed to do something or that more could have been done. In these specific cases, the participants were bargaining with themselves in order to move toward healing from the loss; they needed to know that their decision was the appropriate decision and they did all they could prior to the death. This clearly shows that even while coping with this type of death it is important to acknowledge that there may be some regrets and that everything that could be done was in their case.

Bargaining with a higher power follows with the definition and meaning that Kübler-Ross (1969) put on the term and was iterated directly by Participant 4. She stated that in the wake of making the decision to euthanize her companion feline and soon after she was gone that turned to God through prayer. This participant appeared to be ingrained in her faith as she mentioned throughout her account that she was very active in her church. Toray (2004) asserts that grieving can be a spiritual process that can include bargaining with God in order to search for meaningful interpretation of a traumatic or difficult experience.

**Continued bond.** A continued bond was found as a common experience for almost all of the participants regardless of their multicultural dimensions or individual situation. Each of these participants spoke of either the ashes they saved, the tree they planted, or the
final resting place of their companion animal; all of these reminders were also close in proximity to the individual and was meaningful for the guardians. In attachment theory, Bowlby believed that the bereaved use this continued bond to feel a sense of connection with the deceased and this can lead to better adjustment of life after death (as cited in Boyraz & Bricker, 2011, p. 385). The one participant who did not continue the bond with the deceased companion animal, Participant 2, was not awarded with the opportunity to do so as she was not given the remains of her companion canine. It is unclear, however, if this was an option presented to her by the veterinarian but she did note that she was “glad because I didn’t want to deal with that” when asked about any memorials that she performed for her companion canine.

Continuing the bond with an important other that is deceased is something that many people practice with both humans (Bowlby, 1980; LaLande & Bonanno, 2006; Marshall & Sutherland, 2008; Valentine, 2010) and companion animals (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011; Gerwolls & Labott, 1994; Sife, 2005; Torray, 2004). Although this could be viewed as a component of the bond theme, it was best placed in the internal process theme due to the fact that the actions taken to continue the bond were seen as a way in which the individual honored the memory of the companion animal in a positive manner; aiding in resolving their loss (Sife, 2005). Toray (2004) states that the rituals that one performs serve as an important function of the grieving process as it allows the bereaved to express their grief and create a manner in which they can stay connected to the dead companion animal. The findings of this study go against the idea that Western thought discourages continuing bonds with deceased others as this practice can hinder one’s healing process through disallowing acceptance of the
loss (Hsu, et al., 2004; LaLande & Bonanno, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2008); this provides evidence that individuals may choose to continue the bond with the deceased regardless of societal traditions and expectations.

**Denial.** After learning the shocking news of imminent death of the companion animal, many of the participants noted a sense of denial. Denial is a mental defense mechanism that is initiated when individuals receive information that is too difficult to comprehend (Sife, 2005). This was presented mostly to the veterinarian that was delivering the news and was a reaction to hearing this information for the first time. All of the participants that spoke of their denial also noted that while they acknowledged that their companion animal was getting older and would eventually pass away, that hearing the news about the illness that would take their lives for the first time took them aback. The threat of a loss of a human or a pet can be met with refusal of the information in the form of denial (McNicholas, et al., 2005). The data in this study supports Archer and Winchester’s (1994) pet loss and bereavement study that found denial in half of the participants that experienced the loss of their companion animals. Denial is seen as the first stage in the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief (1969) as a shock reaction to hearing news that is emotionally difficult to comprehend. Denial and disbelief are two reactions that can occur in the wake of a companion animal loss and are the briefest stages in this traumatic event (Sife, 2005).

More than half of the participants noted this sense of denial of the news they had just received from the veterinarian about the health of their companion animals. They mostly stated their response to the news as a state of disbelief; what they were hearing could not be true even though they were privy to the fact that they would most likely outlive their
companion animals. Only two of the participants did not speak of denial in their lived experience and possible reasons for this are ingrained faith (Participant 1) and lack of terminal illness (Participant 5). Participant 1 self-identified as a Hindu and in this faith there is a sense that things in the universe occur because it was God’s will and death is a natural aspect of life (Thrane, 2010). The lack of denial could be a result of her faith in the cycle of life and that all life must come to an end; to deny the impending death would mean that she was straying from what her faith ingrained in her about death. Participant 5 was not a man of faith; however, in his situation his companion canine did not become terminally ill. In this case the companion canine was growing older and not able to live the life he used to as he couldn’t walk very well and could not control his bodily functions. The participant was aware that the quality of life and time he had remaining was decreasing and therefore he did not deny the fact that he would soon be facing the humanitarian obligation and decision of removing the pain and suffering for his companion canine.

**Depression.** Each of the participants described the depression they experienced as emotional throughout the process of losing their companion animal. Similarly to Kübler-Ross’ (1969) theory regarding human death, these individuals faced depression multiple times after learning of the decline in health and eventual death of their companion animal. Toray (2004) posited that the loss of a pet can leave the bereaved with intensified symptoms of depression and anxiety and that this can be expected as grief is an emotional process. This is also aligned with Zottarelli’s (2010) idea that pet loss can result in significant stressors by way of depressed symptoms, grief, and a disruption of daily life.
Depression was the most salient code within the internal process theme. Depression can be extended throughout the grieving period and offers a necessary escape from the intense feelings through temporarily dulling the pain (Sife, 2005). Although each participant noted several manners in which they displayed their depression after the death of the companion animal they all spoke about their depressive symptoms and feelings as a component of their lived experiences; the way in which an individual displays symptoms of depression is unique and may stray from societal expectations. In this study, the male participants noted that they cried and sobbed after the loss of the companion animal which goes against the idea of masking emotions to secure a societal masculine image (Gosse & Barnes, 1994; Pinhey & Ellison, 1997). Based on these results, it can be hypothesized that individuals who face the loss of a companion animal will be impacted by some symptom of depression.

**Improved self.** Going through the process of bereavement can lead to existential awareness and personal growth and confirms redefining phase of loss of an attachment figure (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011). For at least half of this group, experiencing the loss of a companion animal provided a special awareness; they became more aware of the bond with the companion animal, of their support system, how this relationship impacted her/his life, and how to move forward in life keeping hold of the memory of the deceased without holding onto the pain. An improved self was viewed as an outcome of the process of grieving the loss of a companion animal.

Sife (2005) asserts that an improved self is the result of resolution of the death of a companion animal; that this is a way in which the bereaved can pay tribute to the deceased in
a way of honoring all that their lives meant to the guardian. Four of the participants spoke about how their lives are now better after living with their companion animal and through this specific experience. All of these participants made general statements of how their lives are better having had this special relationship and speaking about it, acknowledging just how much they learned through this difficult experience. The knowledge gained through this process can aid individuals in learning from the past in order to be a better companion animal guardian and person in the future (Sife, 2005). All of the male participants’ spoke of this improved self as well as the younger female participant, indicating that gender and age influence a sense of the ability to improve oneself.

**Noted absence.** Adjusting to the physical absence of a companion animal was proven to be somewhat difficult. More than half of the participants mentioned how they would be more careful in habitual places in the house where the companion animal occupied, even after they were gone. This was found to be true for those participants that were not in another human animal relationship at the time of the interview. The participants that spoke about this mentioned how they would step over places that the companion animal once laid out of habit or that they noticed how quiet the house was. Torray (2004) related this to a manner in which the individual copes and adjusts to the tangible and intangible losses in order to move forward in resolving their grief. The decision to enter into another companion animal relationship must come at the right time for the individual and after resolving the grief of the deceased (Sife, 2005)

**Summary.** Kübler-Ross paved the way for learning about the stages of grief through open and public discussion resulting in an idea that individuals go through stages when death
is imminent and that these stages are universal but handled differently by everyone (Rosenthal, 2002). This study’s aim was to provide some commonalities to the experience of grieving over the death of a companion animal through a similar method; using one’s own language in order to create meaning of the lived experience.

A majority of the participants noted an experience with each code when speaking about the lived experience of grieving the loss of a companion animal. It can be inferred that many individuals who experience the death of a companion animal will also present with many of these emotions and actions; although they may experience them in individual manners. There were some unique perspectives to this lived experience, there was also commonality across the participants’ narratives; depression is something that can be expected when working through the death of a companion animal. However, the symptoms one displays are unique to the individual and can stray from societal gender expectations.

The factors that affect how one grieves the loss of a companion animal began to emerge from the data when looking at internal process and resembled the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief. Control over the factors that contributed to the death affected acceptance of the loss; the process of euthanizing the companion animal led to an acknowledgement of a humanitarian obligation to remove pain and suffering. Bargaining with a loss came from two perspectives: bargaining with self and bargaining with a higher power. Bargaining with self was mentioned as a manner in which one resolved the guilt through acknowledging that every effort was made to ensure a good quality of life for the companion animal. One’s faith influenced how one coped with the loss of a companion animal by influencing the presence or absence of not only bargaining with a higher power but also denial of the loss, and
followed with religious tenets. Denial represented a shock reaction to the news of the illness that would take the lives of the companion animals; the expectation of death and illness of the companion animal also impacted this reaction. Depression was a salient factor in the grief experienced for all participants and was found to go against societal gender norms for the male participants. The age of and/or the disease impacting the companion animal indicated the absence of anger in this sample; different circumstances of death could result in an anger response.

Grief is a process of healing and learning through continuing the bond with the deceased, improving oneself, and learning new routines; all complementing the Kübler-Ross model through allowing for the celebration of life to continue as a way of resolving the grief. The support system of the bereaved affected the decision to continue the bond with the deceased companion animal; for those with a perceived positive support system this was a way in which the bereaved chose to celebrate the memories of the companion animal in a positive manner. Whereas improving of self, represented a way to honor the memory and experience of the loss through the acknowledgement of inner growth; this is impacted by both age and gender. There is a notable absence in learning to adapt to life without a companion animal through continuing to practice or the expectation of certain habitual behaviors; other human animal relationships affect the realization of something missing.

**Bond.** Results showed similarities and differences in the bond one had with a companion animal in this diverse group of participants. The bond theme best addressed the second research question: what are the similarities and differences in human animal attachment as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners? Within the theme
of bond, similarities were found in discussions of the beginning and end of the relationship as well as in seeing the companion animal as a human-equivalent. The differences that emerged appeared in avoidance from future companion animal relationships and linking the companion animal to a symbolic, deceased individual. This study provided insight into the many similarities in the bonds that the participants had with their companion animals; noting that there was a situational social influence that affected the decision to enter into relationships with companion animals in many cases.

The meanings that the participants used to describe the bond with their companion animals provided reasons as to the grief experienced simply due the loss of the relationship rather than the companion animal solely; suggesting that in order for an individual to experience the grief process after death, a bond must have existed during life. The bond between guardian and companion animal has been found to indicate how intensely one will experience grief after loss of a companion animal (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Brown, et al., 1996; Clements, et al., 2003; Field, et al., 2009; Planchon, et al., 2002; Sife, 2005; Torray, 2004). Although the findings of this study did not determine intensity of grief, there was confirmation that the length one’s bond with their companion animal impacted the internal process by ways of the decision to continue the bond as a way of healing from the loss.

Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1969) states that in order for an individual to recognize an attachment bond they must rely on the other as a source of comfort of security. This factor of Attachment Theory has been used against the acceptance of acknowledging that a human animal bond is a valid attachment bond (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011). Emergent codes within the bond theme validated the fact that these relationships were, in fact, attachment bonds
through using human characteristics to describe the relationship, linking the companion animal to close deceased others, as well as speaking about the beginning and end of the relationship and potential to once again enter into this type of relationship.

Clements, et al. (2003) notes that each pet represents a different role in a guardian’s life and this role can influence the grief reactions after death. In addition to the role the companion animal plays in the life of the companion animal, Clements, et al. also stated that the length of time and age with the animal, nature and intensity of the relationship, and circumstances of death can affect grief after death. Torray (2004) added to this list to include the belief that the companion animal was a symbolic link to a significant person, reasons for and acquisition of the companion animal, and relying on the companion animal for support as additional indicators of exaggerated grief. Torray also noted that anthropomorphism can be a reason for attachment with a companion animal; this special relationship provides individuals with the ability to care for, nurture and become stewards for another (Sife, 2005). The emergent codes provided confirmation to these factors that affect attachment to a companion animal and eventually the grieving process, with many similarities among this diverse group of participants.

**Avoidance.** All of the participants 50 and older in this study spoke about their avoidance of becoming attached to another companion animal. Avoiding things that cause distress is a human reaction developed to lessen further trauma or rehashing a painful event (Sife, 2005). Although this was a common code for this sub-group of participants, each account of their avoidance was unique. Participant 1 stated that she has not acquired another companion animal because she could not go through this type of grief and loss again.
Whereas, Participant 2 spoke about how she avoided another companion animal relationship soon after her loss as suggested by close others and that she has made efforts to avoid attachment to any of the companion animals that have entered her life after this particular loss, but it has proven to be difficult. Still yet, Participant 6 noted that he avoided entering into another companion animal relationship for four years after this initial loss, mentioning that it took him this long before he could even entertain the thought of having another pet. Entering into another companion animal relationship should only occur when the bereaved feels the time is right and after resolving the grief of the previous loss (Sife, 2005). Entering into another companion animal relationship too soon could result in being dissatisfied with the new pet; this is secondary to placing high expectations for the new member of the relationship to be just like the deceased, or as a replacement animal (Sife, 2005).

**Beginning of attachment.** All of the participants indicated a beginning of the relationship in this study. This not only provided the primary investigator with information on the decision to obtain the companion animal but also the length of time of the relationship when combined with information on means of death and demographic survey results. The length of time that one has with a companion animal strengthens the bond and affects the grief experienced after death (Planchon, et al., 2002). Only Participant 2 noted a short duration of the relationship, which would lead one to assume that she had a weaker bond and less grief, however, the intensity of both bond and grief were not measured in this study.

The decision to enter into a human animal relationship and manners in which the participant acquired the companion animal varied, for the most part, amongst this diverse group of participants. Life situations affected this decision for this group of participants; this
presented a glaring difference in gender-identity. The female participants did not extensively plan how they would get their companion animals (where they were from, the sex, or the breed), whereas the male participants did. Participant 1 mentioned that she had always wanted a pet and a family friend’s companion canine had puppies; this led to acquiring her companion canine when the opportunity presented itself sporadically. Participant 2, noted that she had entertained the idea of acquiring a companion animal for companionship due to the amount of time spent at home alone while her husband worked, but had not seriously considered it until she went to the farmer’s market and there was a man selling puppies. Due to the circumstances and lack of another adequate caregiver after the death of the previous caregiver, Participant 4 decided to become a guardian to her companion feline. Lagoni noted that the belief that the companion animal was rescued from death and spending childhood with the companion animal can increase both the bond between the human and companion animal as well as the grief experienced after death (as cited in Torray, 2004, p. 246).

The male participants had polar-opposite experiences; they all iterated the amount of research and time that went into the decision to acquire their companion animals. Two male participants (Participants 5 and 6) spoke of the committed domestic relationships they were in at the time of getting their companion animals and how the relationship impacted this decision. Both of these participants explained that acquiring a companion animal was suggested by their female partners as a test for future children, giving them adequate time to research breeders, breeds, and even the name of the companion animal; noting the social influence that can impact beginning this type of relationship. The remaining male participant was not in a domestic relationship at the time he acquired his companion canine, however, he
did take time to research the characteristics he believed to be admirable when finding the right companion, narrowing his options down to a specific breed.

**End of attachment.** Due to the nature of the study, and questions asked, all of the participants described accounts of companion animal death. Death represents an end of a bond with another and the invested time (Torray, 2004) and circumstances surrounding death (Planchon, et al., 2002; Torray, 2004) have been found to have high correlations with grief. It was not surprising to find that although all of the participants recalled the circumstances that led up to the death, each situation was different.

A majority of the participants decided that euthanasia was the best way to handle the low quality of life of the companion animal, with only one being negatively affected by his age and loss of control of movement and bodily functions. The remaining companion animals that were euthanized were affected with a terminal disease that was discovered when the guardian sought the assistance of a veterinarian. The decision to euthanize an animal is believed to be a component of a guardian’s humanitarian obligation to ease pain and suffering and can complicate grief through creating unmerited guilt for the bereaved (Sife, 2005). Only one of the participants mentioned this grief through bargaining with himself that he did all he could for his companion animal (Participant 5).

Only two of the companion animals in this study died without veterinarian involvement; however they were both diagnosed with terminal illnesses. Participant 3 made arrangements to euthanize his companion animal; however, the canine died the morning of the scheduled procedure. This participant was impacted by unmerited grief similarly to Participant 5. Participant 1 did not make arrangements to have her canine euthanized and it
can be hypothesized that this is due to her ingrained faith. Individuals who follow the tenets of their religious beliefs tend to avoid euthanasia as it is not their duty to take a life away, it is only the duty of god (Sife, 2005).

**Equivalent.** Anthropomorphism was found to shape the meanings the participants made of the roles the companion animals played in their lives. Through ascribing human characteristics, the participants acknowledged the bond they had with their companion animal. It was interesting that half of the participants described their pets as family members whereas the other half thought of them as best friends; with one participant noting both. No clear connections could be made as to the variations that existed in the meanings the participants made of the bond they had with their companion animals, but it is clear that they all viewed them as human-equivalents. Boyraz & Bricker (2011) note that the variations that exist in attributing these characteristics and can influence the level of distress experienced following loss.

In order for this bond to be considered an attachment bond, there must be the presence of either relying on the other as comfort or security (Bowlby, 1969). Describing pets as family members (Clements, et al., 2003; Torray, 2004) and treating them as significant surrogate persons (Zottarelli, 2010) affects the bond one has and the grief experienced after companion animal death. Individuals rely on family members and friends as a source of comfort and by the participants using these words to describe the role the companion animal played in their lives, it can be inferred that they were a valid attachment bond. All of the participants noted that they felt as though these companion animals exhibited human characteristics and experienced grief after they were dead.
**Linking object.** Suffering the loss of significant human relationships was found after the meaning one made of the bond with the companion animal through linking them to the deceased; this also showed how even after death there is a social influence on the bond. Participant 3 spoke about the circumstances surrounding becoming the sole caregiver of her companion feline after her mother passed away and when her companion feline died it was as if she was reliving the death of her parent all over again. Whereas, Participant 4 recalled two important family members that passed away before he began searching for his companion canine. Both of these participants described their bond with their companion animals as a symbolic link to these individuals; Participant 4 even explained that he named his companion canine through using a combination of the names of the two deceased individuals.

Viewing animals as a symbolic link to significant people can increase the bond one has and intensify the grief experienced after death (Lagoni as cited in Torray, 2004, p. 247). Additionally, the variations in the meaning one makes of the bond with a companion animal can impact the level of distress after death (Boyraz & Bricker, 2011). In Attachment Theory, not all affectional bonds are considered to also be attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1969). However, these individuals spoke of the bond with their companion animals in a manner of redeveloping closeness to an important attachment figure that is no longer living; acknowledging they were a source of comfort. This confirms that their relationships with these companion animals were true attachment bonds as Boyraz and Bricker (2011) state as a requirement of this type of bond.

**Summary.** Human animal relationships have been scrutinized as to the appropriateness of using Attachment Theory when describing the bond between guardian and...
companion animal (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Boyraz & Bricker, 2011; Field, et al., 1994); however the results of this study show that these individuals viewed their companion animals as a source of comfort and security just as in true human attachment bonds. Similarities were found in this study in how the participants described their deceased companion animals using human attributes, using terms that related to family and/or friendship; regardless of multicultural factors and individual experiences. Gender differences were found in how one chose to enter into a companion animal relationship and the time spent into making this decision. Men were more apt to take time to research the appropriate breed, breeder, and name of the companion animal. Marital status in addition to gender also provided information that this decision can be influenced by a romantic partner; men who are in a committed relationship with plans for marrying saw this as an opportunity, with the help of their partner, as a way in which to prepare for future children and as a way to ensure added security when the women were alone in the home.

Euthanasia is a humanitarian obligation for a guardian to remove pain and suffering, if awarded that opportunity; however the decision to euthanize an animal is impacted by ingrained faith in believing that only a higher power has the responsibility to end life. Retrospective thinking for participants aged 50+ note an avoidance tactic in the decision to take on the responsibility of another human-animal relationship; this could be a result of never fully resolving the grief from the death of the companion animal that was the subject of the study. Those individuals who suffered great personal human losses before acquiring their companion animal saw this as an opportunity to link the companion animal with the
deceased; this intensifies not only the bond but can impact grief in creating a sense that one is reliving the human death with the death of the linking object/companion animal.

**Social influence.** The result of this study indicated the similarities and differences in one’s worldview for this sample of multicultural participants; a strong positive support system aids in grieving in a social manner and fosters healing from the loss. *Social influence* best addressed the third research question: what are the similarities and differences in how one’s worldview shapes mourning over the death of a companion animal as described by a multicultural sample of grieving pet owners?

Within the theme of *social influence*, similarities were found in discussions of those participants that described their support system as being positive and sharing the news to others about their loss. The glaring difference that emerged appeared in one participant’s account of her experience; a lack of support coerced the sharing of information about and openly grieving the loss. This study provided insight into the similarities in how an individual’s worldview can shape the experience of mourning the loss of a companion animal; not only does a negative support system affect grief after loss, but also the comfort of sharing information about the bond that was developed.

As stated earlier, grief is a social process (Sife, 2005; Torray, 2004) and without adequate support, one can remain unhealed in their loss. Society places expectations regarding mourning and appropriate behaviors the bereaved exhibits (Rubin & Yaslen-Esmail, 2004), greatly affecting how one will openly grieve the loss of a companion animal. Although grief, bereavement and mourning are all closely related terms in working through the death of someone important, mourning describes the culture-based practices that an
individual demonstrates after this type of loss (Schoulte, 2011). Societal gender expectations can also dictate the rules of how men and women experience bereavement; men will typically use this experience as a time to problem-solve and refrain from sharing emotions due to the risk of being seen as less masculine and believe that their support is short lived (Daggett, 2002). Cultural, ethnic, and religious background strongly affects the adjustment to death (Weinstein, 2003), however regardless of one’s multicultural makeup, unsupportive others lead the bereaved to experience shame in expressing the emotional adjustment to life after death (Hsu, et al., 2004). The perceived understanding from others after this stressful life event can lead to intensified grief responses (Torray, 2004). The data showed a social influence with this population of companion animal guardians in that a positive support system allowed the bereaved to openly grieve the loss of their companion animal and speak about their loss in an unfiltered manner whereas negative support resulted in coerced disenfranchised grief and selective sharing of the experience.

**Advice givers.** Only one participant disclosed a negative support system by way of noting the advice givers in her life at the time of her loss. Participant 2 noted multiple times in the account of her loss, those close family members who offered up simple suggestions to “get over” the death of her companion canine; with some suggesting to just replace what was lost or even go shopping as it would help her get over anything. Companion animal death is trivialized for many suffering this type of loss, and is not consistently recognized by friends, family, and others as significant or an authentic occasion for bereavement (Clements, et al., 2003). Individuals are influenced not only by the dominant cultural views but also by personal cultural values, teachings, experiences, and perceptions (Zebracki & Stancin, 2007).
Participant 2 had the perception that close others in her life did not understand or view her loss as valid, and this greatly impacted how much she shared with them and how visible she made her pain from her loss to these individuals.

**Coercion.** Participant 2 was the only one to mention that her grief was coerced by unsupportive others. This is well aligned with the fact that little to no support from family members can complicate the grief process, creating an experience of disenfranchised grief where an individual believes that they cannot openly as the relationship, the loss, or the bereaved are not recognized (Torray, 2004). When speaking about her experience of loss, Participant 2 noted that she avoided speaking with her family about her loss and that she dealt with it on her own specifically stating that she kept herself occupied with work and other things. Additionally, she stated that her work was unaware of her loss; in fact, she stated that they most likely did not even know that her companion canine was sick and therefore she did not ask for bereavement accommodations.

This participant was raised in a very rural county in Eastern North Carolina. She grew up in a farm community that relied on the animals living on the farm for nutrition, although she felt oddly about eating animals that she cared for just days prior to being slaughtered. One could conclude that this lack of social support in the form of coercion could be directly related to the geographic location she was raised and the reliance on animals as a source of nutrition; this aspect has yet to be investigated in the pet loss literature. In loss, individuals expect to experience certain responses to the death of a loved one and this awareness is based on observations of others in a similar situation or on an understanding of how people respond to negative events (Caitlin, 2001). For this reason, it is important for
others to appreciate the pain that one experiences when a companion animal dies. Without
the support of others, it is difficult to heal from this experience and hold onto the positive
memories of the lost relationship.

**Positive support.** Positive support was seen as a source of strength for all but one of
the participants; they iterated that a positive support system is one way in which they were
able to get through the death of their companion animals. This confirms with the suggestion
by Steele (1977) that open and spontaneous expression of grief aids in promoting
psychological health. An outpouring of support was recalled by many of the participants in
this study; some spoke of the condolence cards they received, numerous social media posts
that were sent by others, and family members that were a source of comfort in their time of
need. It was obvious that these participants were grateful for the support they received from
others and that this truly aided them in healing from the loss of their companion animals, as
they were able to cry, express their feelings, and pushed to experience fully the loss in a
supportive manner; with men straying from the gender expectation of masculinity (Pinhey &
Ellison, 1997) through crying openly. The perception of positive support from others can
greatly alleviate symptoms of grief for the bereaved (Torray, 2004).

**Selective.** Careful sharing of information with others about the death of a companion
animal was found to be shaped by perception of understanding from others and directly
confirms Torray’s (2004) idea that with a lack of social support, bereaved individuals may
feel embarrassed to reveal the important roles that a pet played in their lives. For this group
of participants, only two revealed that they were selective in sharing the news of the death to
others. Taking steps to hide the death is a function of providing psychological distance
between the deceased and survivors (Steele, 1977). Aligning with other negative aspects of social influence (advice givers and coercion), Participant 2 noted that she was very selective in who she told about her companion canine’s death. She recalled that she only told individuals that she believed understood the bond between a human and pet about the death; for those others she perceived would not understand, she did not share this information. Participant 3 also noted that he was selective in telling others about his loss; however he knew that these individuals took interest in his companion canine so he told everyone even though it made him uncomfortable. One could assume that this participant was apprehensive about sharing information about his loss due to societal expectations of men to refrain from showing emotion. There is a risk of shame over exposing emotions, as a sign of vulnerability during the grieving period (Hsu, et al., 2004); however it is apparent in this particular case that a strong positive community can propel an individual to experience discomfort.

**Unfiltered.** A great majority of the participants described that they openly discussed the death of their companion animals; they told everyone that they encountered about their loss, worrying less about acceptance from others. Participant 3 noted that he was not only selective in his sharing but that he “told everyone” regardless of being uncomfortable sharing his emotions about his loss. For this participant in particular, he acknowledged that the individuals in his life also cared about his companion canine and therefore he felt it was a duty to them to allow others to also express their grief and provide support in working through his personal grief. Although people rarely grieve in isolation, this process is a time for others to lend support to the bereaved by way of letting them know that they are not alone in this loss (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008). For this group of participants, anticipation of
positive support provided an opportunity to share information with those individuals that were important in their lives and the lives of their companion animals, providing the bereaved with a social expression of grief.

Summary. One’s worldview is a strong force in sharing emotions and information about the death of a loved one. All of the participants spoke about their comfort level in sharing information with close others about the loss experienced; regardless of gender, one’s social support system influenced whether or not they included others in mourning the loss of an important figure. The one striking difference was presented by the one participant that was raised in a rural farming community; relying on animals as a source of nutrition and financial support skewed the significance of companion animal loss in the community of the bereaved and created the perception of negative or low social support leading to grieving without important family members.

Limitations

As with many studies, this research is not flawless. Undoubtedly, acquiring a large sample size in this study was proven to be difficult. Prior to conducting the research, there were numerous potential participants that surfaced through purposeful recruitment. Some who initially expressed interest in being involved in the study during recruitment chose not to participate when the time came to conduct the semi-structured interviews; resulting in six willing participants. It is important to not generalize these results to all individuals who experience the loss of a companion animal as individual progressions through bereavement were evident in this data. Rather this information should be utilized in order to present some common experiences after the death of a non-human attachment figure. The sample size
creates difficulty in making gross generalizations about this phenomenon; however it presented a starting point for society to acknowledge the death of a companion animal as a valid experience for expressing grief, bereavement and mourning and that these relationships are true attachment bonds. Additionally, due to the reluctance of individuals to participate in this study, the species of companion animal that died was not equally distributed; therefore similarities and differences could not be made about how one would grieve over the loss of a canine versus a feline and caution should be heeded in making generalizations about species of companion animal.

Another limitation that could be assumed in the research is the emic perspective of the primary investigator. In this situation, the desire to complete research on pet loss and human bereavement was one of personal interest. The primary investigator is a dog owner and has lost companion animals in the past, the most recent loss came during the collection of data. The primary investigator is currently a mutual caregiver to one canine. Within the past six months two of the elderly canines left the household; one to death and the other moved in with family members of the primary investigator. The canine that died during the collection of the data was diagnosed with bone cancer (2010) and lymphoma (2012) and, although this particular canine was in moderate health and receiving medical treatment, her medical condition and quality of life quickly declined and it was decided that euthanasia was the best option to relieve further suffering. Although there is a history of companion animal ownership and/or death among the research team, neither biases nor personal experiences surfacing in the data analysis.
Implications for Practice and Research

Although this study presented validation of this special type of bond and loss, there is much more work to be done in order for society to acknowledge that the death of a companion animal is a justified, emotionally difficult time for the bereaved. There must be a shift in how the Western world views death, in general not just in companion animal loss. Informing mental health professionals about the factors that impact resolving this grief is just a starting point. As the number of individuals that are impacted by this type of loss increases, so will the number of individuals who will seek the support of mental health professionals. Clinicians are in a position to offer support to the bereaved leading to an acknowledgement of this grief in the eyes of the general public (Planchon, et al., 2002).

As Torray (2004) suggested, there is a need for a link between mental health professionals and veterinarians in validating and resolving this grief. Veterinarians are typically the ones that guardians may seek counseling from due to the close proximity at the time of this difficult situation (Sife, 2005) and are not always trained in how to emotionally support companion animal guardians in making the decision to euthanize an important family member. Although more and more veterinary degree programs are including some training on counseling skills for their students (Dunn, et al., 2005), more work needs to be done in this curricular integration of veterinary and counseling skills. During this time of veterinary curricular development it is important for mental health professionals to make connections with local veterinarians in order to provide resources and referrals to clients; acknowledging the lack of providing counseling referrals will result in many individuals experiencing unresolved grief and perpetual pain.
Just as the American Counseling Association (2005) states as an ethical code for counselors and counselor educators, multicultural competence must be developed in training and continuing education efforts. A foundation in grief and attachment theories, in regards to the human-animal bond, can provide mental health professionals with insights into a client’s social support, coping skills, and grief responses (Torray, 2004). It is important for the mental health profession to see past multiculturalism as solely a racial/ethical, gender, and/or religious factor but rather as a one’s worldview including companion animal relationships. In order to do this, it is important to first recognize companion animals as a part of the family system. Individuals may seek pet loss support by ways of counseling, in order to manage their guilt, normalize the experience, assist with the final decision to euthanize, cope with the unknown in the case of lost or missing pets, find and create companion animal bereavement rituals, and deciding to enter into another companion animal relationship (Rosenthal, 2002). In order to assist clients that present with grief symptoms from this type of loss, it is suggested that mental health professionals include intake questions that address the presence of companion animal relationships (Donahue, 2005). The perception of a lack of understanding or fear of embarrassment may lead the bereaved to avoid disclosing the reason for seeking counseling due to the death of a companion animal to the clinician (Sife, 2005); adding these questions to the intake will enhance rapport building between the bereaved client and counselor. It is important for mental health professionals to provide an environment of acceptance and understanding for the bereaved in order to enhance the healing process through the promotion of coping skills in this unique situation (Clements, et al., 2003; Torray, 2004).
Although this study provided validation of the human-animal bond and the grief that is experienced after death through using thick descriptions, more research must be conducted in order to see the whole picture of this phenomenon. A great majority of the participants in this study were in human-canine relationships; therefore it would be advised that future research look deeper into the similarities and differences of canine versus feline relationships to determine if there is a difference in the meaning a guardian makes of both the bond and the grief experience after death. The human-animal bond may be stronger for canine companion animals due to the affectionate behavior of canines versus felines; felines are believed to be more independent than dogs and are perceived to be moody (Serpell, 1996). Other types of human animal relationships can also be added to literature surrounding pet loss grief, including individuals who lose farm animals, difference species of pet (i.e., reptiles, pocket pets, birds, etc.), and assistance animals. Conducting research on these other relationship dynamics would undoubtedly add to fully understanding this phenomenon. The participants in this study were also found to be highly educated; obtaining a college degree is not awarded to all individuals. Future research should also be conducted through acquiring individuals who have not received formal education as variety could be present in education level and socioeconomic background.

Another suggestion for future research would be to include the family system in qualitative interviews. For this sample, the participants were either married, in a romantic relationship, or living with another family member at the time of the loss; due to the focus of this research information was not requested of those others that may have been able to further validate the grief experienced after death. It would be interesting to see just how different
family members make meaning of the entire experience of the companion-animal relationship. It is believed that each pet can represent a different role to each family and each member (Clements, et al., 2003). Research that involves at least one other family member would assist in acknowledging the different roles that a pet can serve for each member of the same family system as well as the variation of grief responses after death.

Anger was not found as a grief response in this sample of participants; it is hypothesized that this is due to the fact that the companion animals were either old and/or plagued by a terminal illness. It would be advised for future research to not only include accidental death but also loss due to other circumstances (i.e., lost/missing, theft, need to surrender, end of interpersonal or romantic relationships). Anger may be a result of accidental death or illness that plagues a relatively healthy companion animal; due to the sample that volunteered for this study, there was a lack of controlling for the type of loss. Loss due to other circumstances can greatly affect the individual; for example one can experience perpetual hope for a safe return in the case of lost/missing companion animals and may never resolve the pain of their loss because there is no confirmation of death (Sife, 2005). Relationship issues may be one cause for loss without death; some divorced couples may even seek custody of a companion animal in their settlement out of spite of the other. These are specific cases that have many possibilities but have been left uninvestigated; much more depth to this phenomenon would be added with investigating other types of loss and the impact on the individual.

The goal of this study was to acquire a multicultural sample of companion animal guardians that have experienced death of an important attachment animal. There are many
intersections of multiculturalism that were left unexplored in this study; all of the participants were over 30 years of age and all of the male participants were from the same racial category. Although there was variety in the participants’ religious beliefs and affiliations, it appeared that religious beliefs affected the response for some of the participants in this study; however one’s religiosity was not specifically addressed in this study. Sife (2005) notes in his book that some individuals may use their ingrained faith and religious teachings as a way to avoid making the decision to euthanize a companion animal; researching this component of pet death would add to the realm of this experience and also aid mental health professionals in working with clients that may seek treatment for this type of grief. All of the participants in this study were from two specific geographical areas in the United States; therefore generalization to other locations within the U.S. as well as internationally could not be made with certainty and it is suggested that this be explored on an international level.

Diverse factors were evident in the time since the loss and conducting the interview; the range was five weeks to 23 years. Acquiring participants that have an equal amount of time since death can be problematic as it would require a large number of individuals that are willing to share this information; access would require close work between veterinarians and researchers. Although a wide range was evident in this study, the research did not seem to suffer. Conducting research that relies on the memories of past events can provide problems in recall impacting the results, however, in this study it did not appear that time since the loss had an effect on the meanings made by the participants. Future research could share insight on how memory may impact this phenomenon.
Finally, as the number of individuals perceived to seek counseling to resolve their grief increases, researching biases and preparedness of mental health professionals in relation to pet loss and human bereavement would aid in developing educational opportunities for this field. Westernized thought may have aided in the reluctance for society to view this type of loss as a justified event for emotional and physical grief and therefore it is imperative that counselors assess their biases and knowledge of this type of loss in order to acknowledge limitations and prepare referrals if needed. More training programs on pet loss grief need to be developed for those working in the mental health field; as of the current time the Association for Pet Loss and Human Bereavement and the American Institute of Healthcare Professionals are the only two organizations that certify individuals in this specialization. An increase in the need for mental health professional to become trained in this field will be required as a greater number of individuals become companion animal guardians and society becomes more informed about this special case of grief and loss.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide insights into the meanings companion animal guardians made after surviving the death of an important, non-human, attachment figure. The grief expressions after death among the participants were found to not only mimic the Kübler-Ross Model of Grief but also incorporated aspects of Bowlby’s Attachment Theory and confirm past research and literature. It was also confirmed that healing from this loss among the participants was found to be shaped by one’s worldview; without a positive support system one may be unable to resolve their grief. Determining that the bonds that the guardians had with their companion animals were true attachment bonds was a significant
finding. It is a hope for this researcher that awareness of this experience provides implications for not only mental health professionals but also society; increase in awareness of this phenomenon will aid in social legitimization of the grief that is experienced after the death of a companion animal and provide those affected to the ability to heal from their pain.

This study found that there is a social influence in the meaning made of a human animal bond and displaying outward emotions of grief when the bond has ended. These participants experienced a variety of grief symptoms and were influenced in their outward expressions of grief based on the perception of understanding from others. Depression was seen as a common experience for the participants, with males deviating for gender expression expectations. The presence or absence of other stages of grief were shaped by one’s personal situation and may have been influenced by ingrained faith. In one’s adjustment to the loss, the participants sought opportunities to keep a connection with the deceased, learned new daily rituals, and found themselves to be improved after living through this traumatic ordeal.

The bond that the participants had with their companion animal was found to exhibit similarities to a true attachment bond. In making meaning of the attachment to the companion animal, the participants noted that others were influential from the beginning to the end of the relationship. The bond they had with their companion animals were ones in which the pets were seen as human equivalents, some with direct ties to other deceased important individuals. The bond was found to influence the grieving process for these individuals; without this bond there would be not grief and an opportunity to grow. A lack in social support, perceived or actual, resulted in unresolved grief. Social support in a wide variety of populations can greatly assist the bereaved in resolving their grief and living life
after this death in a positive manner that celebrates the memories of the relationship, rather
avoiding this resolution due to the risks associated with being ashamed of the amount of grief
experienced in the community.
REFERENCES


http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/pet_overpopulation/facts/pet_ownership_statistics.html


10.1007/978-1-4419-6241-6_5


APPENDICES
Appendix A: IRB Consent

From: Carol Mickelson, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: May 17, 2012
Title: Pet loss and human bereavement: A phenomenological study of attachment and the grieving process
IRB#: 2662

Dear Michelle Crossley

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Carol Mickelson
NC State IRB
Appendix B: Informed Consent

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Pet loss and human bereavement: A phenomenological study of attachment and the grieving process

Principal Investigator: Michelle Kay Crossley
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr. Siu-Man Ting

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
I am requesting your participation in a research study, the purpose of which is to explore the experience of pet owners who have experienced the death of one or more companion animals. Topics will cover the roles that your companion animal served in your life, nature of the death, coping mechanisms after the death, and support received after the death of the companion animal. In order to endure that the participant is understood, the principal investigator will use member checking with the participant. This process will allow the participant to have full access to the transcripts that result from the recorded interviews. The transcript will be emailed to the participant upon completion by the principal investigator. This will provide the participant to edit any of their words from the transcripts until the participant is satisfied with the wording.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded and complete a brief demographic form. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes including paperwork and will take place in a private environment convenient for the participant. In the event that an in person interview cannot take place, utilization of Skype© or other video conferencing software will be utilized at the discretion and permission of the participant. In the event the interview does occur over Skype© then the primary investigator will work with the participant to first ensure that all paper documents have been reviewed, completed, and returned to the primary investigators and then determine a time convenient for the participant to ensure confidentiality (i.e., no other person is able to listen in to the interview and the participant feels safe). The topics of pet loss will be covered and will include topics of: companion animal role in the family, nature of death, coping with the death, and interpersonal support received after the death. The questions of the semi-structured interview will be open ended meaning that there is no right or wrong answer. The demographic form will take approximately 2 minutes to complete and will ask for demographic information (age, education, race/ethnicity, etc.). The interviews will be tape recorded by the principal investigator for review and transcription purposes. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim. Participants will be requested to verify and possibly edit their transcription via email, which may be intercepted by third parties. An alternative method of meeting in person or over the phone will be made available should the participant decline permission of sending the transcript by email. The purpose of providing the participant with the transcript of the interview is to ensure accuracy of the event and ensure that the meaning of the experience is true to the actual experience of pet loss and bereavement. Individual responses will be transcribed in the participants’ language and will be documented in the research. Participants’ identities will be protected. Each participant will create a code that only they and the principal investigator will know. These codes will be protected by the principal investigator. The participants’ identities will be protected in the research write up by referring to the participant created code rather than using identifying information. The principal investigator may retain your identifying information and contact you in the future if you verbalize a willingness to participate in future research conducted by the primary investigator in the future.

Risks
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences associated with pet loss and human bereavement, which may be associated with an emotionally difficult time in your life. Due to this, I ask that you only share those experiences you are comfortable with sharing. At the end of the interview, the principal investigator would like to take some time to speak about the experience of participating in the study.

Benefits
It is anticipated that you may benefit from sharing your journey with the death of your companion animal. Being able to speak about the experience has been found to be therapeutic and can create closure of the event. Additionally, future companion animal owners and mental health professionals can benefit from this research as it can contribute to the body of knowledge in the future.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Direct quotes will be used in reports of the research. Data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. Additionally, the computer used to transcribe the interviews will be protected using a password that only the principal investigator will know. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your
identity to the answers that you provide. The audio tapes will be destroyed once the research is complete. The principal investigator will ensure privacy and confidentiality of the participants by removing and not including any identifying information in the transmittal email or the interview transcript.

**Compensation**
You will not receive any compensation for participating

**What if you are a NCSU employee?**
Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Michelle Kay Crossley, at 520 Poe Hall, NCSU or via email at michelle_crossley@ncsu.edu (please specify the title of this study in the subject line).

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

**Consent To Participate**
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject’s signature_______________________________________ Date _________________

Investigator’s signature____________________________________ Date _______________
Appendix C: Demographic Form

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM: PET LOSS AND HUMAN BEREAVEMENT STUDY

PARTICIPANT DATA FORM

All information on this form is kept confidential and is available only to the Principal Investigator. When used for research purposes all names are removed. You will be asked to develop a code that only the Principal Investigator and you will know for research analysis identification purposes. This form will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the Principal Investigator and will be destroyed at the completion of this study. You will be provided with the opportunity to participate in a related study in the future, if you so choose. Your willingness to participate in future studies will not impact the current study. Thank you for your participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information about you</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race and/or Ethnic Background</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ African American or Black</td>
<td>□ 18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>□ 21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Asian</td>
<td>□ 26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Caucasian or White</td>
<td>□ 31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>□ 36-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Middle Eastern</td>
<td>□ 41-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Multiracial</td>
<td>□ 46-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other (please specify):</td>
<td>□ 50+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th><strong>Gender Identity</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Divorced</td>
<td>□ Bisexual</td>
<td>□ Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Domestic Relationship</td>
<td>□ Gay</td>
<td>□ Intersex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Married</td>
<td>□ Heterosexual</td>
<td>□ Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Separated</td>
<td>□ Lesbian</td>
<td>□ Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Single</td>
<td>□ Omni/para-sexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Widowed</td>
<td>□ Other (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th><strong>Employment Status</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Some high school</td>
<td>□ Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ High school diploma or G.E.D.</td>
<td>□ Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Some college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Vocational/technical education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Master’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Doctorate or other terminal degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Household (check all that apply)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Aunt or Uncle</td>
<td>□ Child/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Friend</td>
<td>□ Grandchild/ren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Grandparent(s) or in-law grandparent(s)</td>
<td>□ Parent or in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Sibling(s)</td>
<td>□ Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open ended/free response</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current geographic location (City, State)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic location of birth (City, Country or City, State)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Information about your companion animal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companion Animal's Name</th>
<th>Bloodline of Companion Animal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Bloodline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Pure-bred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Mutt/mix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Neutered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open ended/free response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breed of Pet</th>
<th>(approximate if unknown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at Death</th>
<th>(approximate if unknown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Since Death</th>
<th>(approximate if unknown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much money would you estimate that you spent caring for your companion animal?</th>
<th>(approximate if unknown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related questions for the study:

1. Would you be willing to have the verbatim transcript of the interview emailed to you? Y/N
   a. If so, what would be the best email address? ______________________________
   b. If not, would a phone call be suitable? Y/N
      i. What is the best number and time to call? ______________________________

2. Would you be willing to participate in future studies conducted by the Principal Investigator on similar topics? Y/N
   a. Is email the best way to contact you for future studies? Y/N

3. Please develop a 5-digit code including both letters and numbers. This will be used as a way to provide anonymity in the data collection and analysis process. (an example would be your mother’s maiden name initial and birthdate using two-digits for both the month and day). ___________________________________________

Thank you for your participation!
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview

1. How did you come up with the name [name of companion animal]?

2. Was this your first pet?
   a. How many other pets did you have/have you had? When did you have these pets?

3. How did you acquire [name of companion animal]?
   a. Were there other life situations that contributed to your acquisition of the pet?

4. Were you the sole caregiver of [name of companion animal]?
   a. If not, who else helped and what would you say was the percentage of the caregiver role?

5. What role would you say [name of companion animal] played in your (and your family’s) life?

6. Was the death sudden or expected?
   a. If expected, how did you prepare for the death?

7. How did you (and your family) feel immediately following the death?

8. How did your family and friends react to the death?

9. How did you cope with the death?

10. How did your workplace accommodate to your loss/experience?

11. How comfortable were you when telling others about your loss?

12. Did you memorialize [name of companion animal]?
   a. If not, how would you have memorialized them?
Appendix E: Codes

acceptance (A)-acknowledgement of death, decision to euthanize companion animal to ease pain; also actions that provide one last shared experience/memory with companion animal
advice givers (AG)-uncomfortable others who do not provide understanding or empathy in the wake of the loss of the companion animal
avoidance (AV)-avoidance of new companion animal attachment due to fear of another loss
bargaining (B)-turning to a higher power when dealing with imminent loss; feeling as if more could have been done for the companion animal
beginning of attachment (BEG)-manner in which the companion animal was obtained
coercion (CO)-lack of support in dealing with the grief; inability to openly grieve due to fear of others’ perceptions/lack of support
continued bond (CB)-utilization of a variety of methods of remembering the companion animal through burial or cremation (keeping ashes) or honoring the companion animal through giving back to the earth or community in their memory
denial (DN)-keeping busy with distractions; disbelief in imminent death; avoiding the situation
depression (D)-any signs or symptoms of sadness, physical or emotional, when describing life after companion animal death
end of attachment (END)-factors that led to the death/euthanasia of the companion animal
equivalent (EQ)-describing companion animal roles that would normally be used for humans; attributing family or human likeness to the companion animal; mention of treating a companion animal as one would a human
linking object (LO)-any mention of linking the companion animal to previous grief
positive support (PS)-mention of compassion, empathy and understanding of loss by others
selective (S)-fear of others’ response/lack of response when considering disclosure of the companion animal loss
unfiltered (U)-comfort in processing companion animal loss with others; sharing of event without hesitation
improved self (IS)-any mention of self-growth or development due to the process of owning and losing a companion animal
noted absence (NA)-the lack of a companion animal presence after death; mention of habitually expecting the companion animal to still be present after death